



**DELHI UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY**

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Cl. No. V55: L10 MKK (A)

Ac. No. 15616

Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of one anna will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime.

---



THE FALL  
OF THE KAISER



THE KAISER WITH HIS GENFRALS

# THE FALL OF THE KAISER

BY

MAURICE BAUMONT

*Docteur-ès-Lettres,  
University of Paris*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

E. IBBETSON JAMES

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

MUSEUM STREET

PRINTED IN ENGLAND  
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD.  
FROM SOMERSET

FIRST PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH 1931

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	xi
CHAPTER I	
BEFORE ABDICATION	
I	
The Wilson Note of 14 October and the Campaign for the Abdication of the Kaiser—The Wilson Note of 23 October and its Effect on Public Opinion—Vacillations of Prince Max of Baden—Departure of William II for Spa—Cabinet Discussions—Drews' Mission to Spa	3
II	
The Revolution at Kiel—General Groner at Berlin—The Seventh and Eighth of November: Attitude of the Social Democratic Party—The Chancellor's Policy—Admiral von Hintze—Final Efforts of Prince Max	49
III	
The Decisions of G.H.Q.—Conversations of Hindenburg and Groner with General von Plessen	68
v	



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

## CHAPTER II

### THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT SPA

#### I

- The Conference in the Forenoon—Groner *versus* Schulenburg—The Crown Prince—Colonel Heye's Communication—Abdication of the Imperial Throne, but not of the Crown of Prussia 81

#### II

- News of Prince Max's Proclamation—Meeting at Hindenburg's Quarters—Further Conference with the Emperor 124

#### III

- The Evening of 9 November at Spa—Hintze and Plessen intervene—Talk and Thoughts of Resistance—The Kaiser's final Decision 147

## CHAPTER III

### THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

#### I

- Decisions of the Social Democrats and of the Chancellor—Prince Max publishes the News of Abdication—Ebert as Chancellor 163

#### II

- Telephonic Conversations between Spa and Berlin—Hintze's Communication—Conversations between Hintze and Wahnschaffe, Simons and Prince Max 180

#### III

- Prince Max and William II 201

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY

#### I

The Troops at Berlin—General von Scheuch and Governor von Linsingen	207
---	-----

#### II

The Spa Conference of Officers from the Front—Results and Criticisms	214
--	-----

#### III

The Army at the Front and the Troops at Spa—General Groner's Position	231
---	-----

### CONCLUSION

The Journey to Holland—'Death in Action?'—German Comments	241
---	-----

INDEX	251
-------	-----



## PREFACE



## PREFACE

MANY books have been written about the abdication of William II. The chief actors in the event have given their evidence, and there is an abundance of personal recollections and first-hand details.

None the less, the tale is not yet a plain tale. This may be due merely to the state of confusion ordinarily inherent in disaster such as is neither the result of a carefully hatched plot nor the final ebullition of creative ideas after a long period of spiritual preparation. Or it may be that the mere clatter of the falling thrones of Germany obsessed the imagination of the onlookers to the detriment of their powers of observation.

The accounts of eye-witnesses reveal divergences of all kinds, some significant, and omissions which are often inexplicable. Innumerable accounts exist, most of them embroidered and bristling with contradictions and unsupported assertions—the whole constituting a historic mist, destined only for a ridiculous evaporation in the daylight of fact. The truth contained in these narratives varies in inverse proportion to their apparent accuracy of detail. It would need the pen of a satirist adequately to catalogue the fantastic rumours which have been from time to time current as regards the last hours of William II's reign. If the wild canards of the Press of the day,

## PREFACE

even of its more serious elements, were to be subjected to the uncritical examination of pettifogging erudition or conscientious simplicity, the result would be a pot-pourri of the most incredible imaginings.<sup>1</sup>

It is the aim of this book to pass over what may safely be neglected, and to endeavour to clear of their fictitious or melodramatic accretions the essential facts of the day of 9 November 1918, which saw the end of the thirty-one years' reign of William, third German Emperor, and ninth King of Prussia. Every effort has been made to eliminate the hatred that beclouds judgment and to depict the men and the events as they were and as they happened.

It may be asked whether it is not too early to

<sup>1</sup> A few examples taken at random will serve to show the variegated nature of these rumours: (1) By the beginning of November, abdication was already a *fait accompli*, and the authorities were only waiting for a suitable moment to announce it officially; (2) William II had signed an act of abdication on 11 October, before the assembled Princes of the Empire. The Crown Prince signed shortly afterwards; he had called upon his father to abdicate at once in order to save the dynasty, and had been expelled from G.H.Q., after a dramatic scene and a stormy interview with Hindenburg; (3) After bitterly reproaching the High Command for having deceived him, the Kaiser had tried to commit suicide, and a member of his suite had been wounded in trying to prevent him; (4) The Crown Prince had been shot while attempting to cross the Dutch frontier; (5) The Emperor had fled, accompanied by the Empress, 'an elderly man, probably Hindenburg', Prince Joachim, General von Falkenhayn, Admiral von Hintze, the whole of G.H.Q., forty Generals, a number of high officials, etc. etc. . . .

## PREFACE

attempt a study of this nature; whether it is yet possible to consider the events of November 1918 in the serene atmosphere of history. In Germany in particular, there has been little abatement of the rancour born of the Revolution—particularly in those circles which think of the Ninth of November as ‘the darkest day in the history of Prussia and of Germany’.

Despite such ebullitions of the partisan spirit, it may be claimed that this essay has not been written too soon; the whole drama of William II and of his abdication belongs to the past, both as regards the plot and the actors on the scene. ‘The curtain falls and the great drama of dynastic glory reaches its close.’<sup>1</sup> Even were there some fear that in men’s minds the alarms and excursions of international throat-cutting might result in excessive reverence being paid to the Kaiser (by concentrating in his person all the warlike passions of a nation), it must nevertheless be realised that the events here recounted are over and done with. They are already in the dim past, a part of history, and can now well be recorded not only with a consistent attempt at fair-mindedness, but with the cold impartiality with which a historian would tell of the last days of the Imperial House of China.

In this book there is no intention whatsoever of drawing up an indictment in the name of Eternal Justice, of heaping invective on a fallen foe, or of triumphantly criticising what he said or did not

<sup>1</sup> Walther Rathenau.



## PREFACE

say, did or left undone. The author's sole object is, through a reasoned comparison of the evidence of innumerable witnesses, to show in all sincerity in what manner it would appear that William II's decision to abdicate was taken, at first for him, then by him.

CHAPTER I  
BEFORE ABDICATION

The University of Wis

## I

*The Wilson Note of 14 October and the Campaign for the Abdication of the Kaiser—The Wilson Note of 23 October and its Effect on Public Opinion—Vacillations of Prince Max of Baden—Departure of William II for Spa—Cabinet Discussions—Drews' Mission to Spa.*

**D**'ON'T you see? The object of this is to bring down my house, to set the Monarchy aside! Read that!'<sup>1</sup> It was with these words that, on 15 October 1918, William II received Major Alfred Niemann, the representative of G.H.Q., as he indignantly handed him a note which the German Government had just received. 'This was the second 'Wilson Note', addressed on 14 October by the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, to the Swiss *chargé d'affaires*, who was entrusted with the protection of German interests in the United States.

'It is necessary . . . in order that there may be no possibility of misunderstanding, that the President should very solemnly call the attention of the Government of Germany to the language and plain intent of one of the terms of peace which the German Government has now accepted. It is contained in the address of the President delivered at Mount Vernon on 4th July last. It is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Emil Ludwig: *Wilhelm der Zweite*, Berlin, 1926, trans. Ethel Colburn Mayne; *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, London, New York, 1926.

“The destruction of any arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world; or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at the least its reduction to virtual impotency.” The power which has hitherto controlled the German nation is of the sort here described. It is within the choice of the German nation to alter it. The President’s words just quoted naturally constitute a condition precedent to peace, if peace is to come by the action of the German people themselves. The President feels bound to say that the whole process of peace will, in his judgment, depend upon the definiteness and satisfactory character of the guarantees which can be given in this fundamental matter. It is indispensable that the Governments associated against Germany should know beyond a peradventure with whom they are dealing.’

In thus raising the dynastic question, the second Wilson Note was the herald of the storm which was to carry away the crowns of Germany and roll them in the dust. It was the occasion for an outburst of fury and despair among the extreme monarchists, who saw in it ‘an attempt to deliver Germany from the Hohenzollern’, ‘an endeavour to put an end to the monarchic system’. The Empress was full of indignation at ‘the audacity of the parvenu across the seas who has thus dared to humiliate a princely house’.<sup>1</sup> The great

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Njemann: *Kaiser und Revolution*, Berlin, 1922.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

agrarian journal, the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, protested furiously at the idea of this 'most intolerable outrage' that could be inflicted upon a people: 'Must they not think a people capable of the depths of treason when they expect it to abandon a dynasty which has been the architect of its greatness throughout the course of a glorious history?'

Despite the noisy reactions of monarchist zeal, the currents hostile to William II gathered from this time on in ever-increasing force. In the midst of a nation-wide weariness there was intense agitation of feeling. Peace, which was the ideal of the whole people, outweighed all other requirements. Four years of suffering and privations had exhausted the strength of Germany. The nation, which had been nourished on ignorance, had with a rude shock discovered the truth and had realised that it was at the edge of the abyss. Although there was as yet no thought of the republic, there was already much talk of abdication. Before long the word 'abdication', which had previously been carefully kept out of public conversation, was on everyone's lips. The Wolff Agency thought it necessary to state that the rumours 'that the Kaiser is intending to abdicate' were 'of course devoid of all foundation'. Surely, men thought, the Kaiser would soon follow the example of the Bulgarian Coburg.

Conrad Haussmann, the democrat of Wurtemberg, who for more than a year had supported the candidature of Prince Max of Baden

to the Chancellorship, and who on 14 October became Secretary of State without portfolio in Prince Max's Cabinet, before he became in 1919 one of the authors of the Constitution of Weimar, wrote as follows on 7 October in his private diary: 'The Hohenzollern question is in an extremely critical state.'<sup>1</sup> On 15 October he wrote to his daughter: 'You cannot be unaware of the attitude of the American to the Hohenzollern.' The question was even discussed in Government circles. Haussmann had heard that 'the chief representatives of German industry and finance, such as Stinnes, Gwinner, Ballin, Deutsch and Rathenau, hold that the only hope for the State and for the dynasty is the renunciation of the throne by the Kaiser and by his son, and the proclamation of the Kaiser's grandson, with a Regency Council which should include a strong bourgeois representation'. He observed at the time that 'the chief tendency of the moment in Germany is towards the elimination of William and the Crown Prince'.

Like Haussmann, his fellow Wurtemberger, Friedrich von Payer,<sup>2</sup> who was both Hertling's and Prince Max's Vice-Chancellor, notes that in the middle of October the great manufacturing

<sup>1</sup> Conrad Haussmann: *Schlaglichter, Reichstagsbriefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Frankfurt, 1924. Published posthumously. Haussmann died in 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich von Payer: *Von Bethmann Hollweg bis Ebert*, Frankfurt, 1923.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

interests of Berlin were in favour of abdication. In South Germany and, in particular, in Bavaria, there was a feeling of the most utter despair. The general view was that the country should not for the sake of one man suffer the enemy to impose upon it harder conditions of peace. Even the diplomats hinted that the retirement of the Emperor and the Crown Prince would be exacted as conditions of an armistice. Thus, Von der Lancken, the chief assistant of the Governor of occupied Belgium, telegraphed from Brussels on 10 October that Wilson was working for abdication, and again, on 17 October, that the President's second note bore out the accuracy of his previous statement.

It is true that contemporary information from a Dutch source stated at the same period that abdication would not be necessary. But it was difficult to believe this when the Entente Press, more particularly in Great Britain and in the United States, was unanimous in declaring that no peace would be concluded with William II. The general opinion in Germany, as strengthened by information from abroad, was to the effect that abdication would be the means of securing a milder peace from the enemy and of preventing the invasion of German territory; abdication, it was held, could be used as a bargaining counter, as a concession made to the Allies. Although there was little hatred of the Emperor, more and more Germans first wished for and then openly



and even brutally demanded the deposition of the Sovereign, who had become in their eyes either the cause of the war or the pretext for maintaining it. On this subject Philipp Scheidemann, the Social Democrat, wrote as follows:<sup>1</sup> 'If the war had ended in the victory of Germany the Emperor would have been exalted beyond all measure. He would probably have become little less than a demigod. Since events turned out otherwise a scapegoat was looked for and was found in the Kaiser.' Abdication was the general subject of conversation, in meetings public and private, in cafés, offices, trains and trams. The Press alone still maintained a certain reserve, since the censorship had forbidden the papers to discuss the question.

\* \* \*

In his third Note to the German Government, dated 23 October, President Wilson raised directly the question of the rulers of Germany, and in somewhat involved phraseology, which left, however, no room for doubt, defined the conditions which he thought it his duty to lay down.

'... Significant and important as the constitutional changes seem to be which are spoken of by the German Foreign Secretary in his note of the 20th October, it does not appear that the principle of a Government responsible to the German people has yet been fully worked out, or that any guarantees exist or are in contemplation that the

<sup>1</sup> *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin, 1921.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

alterations of principle and of practice now partially agreed upon will be permanent.

Moreover, it does not appear that the heart of the present difficulty has been reached. It may be that future wars have been brought under the control of the German people; but the present war has not been; and it is with the present war that we are dealing. It is evident that the German people have no means of commanding the acquiescence of the military authorities of the Empire in the popular will; that the power of the King of Prussia to control the policy of the Empire is unimpaired; that the determining initiative still remains with those who have hitherto been the masters of Germany.

Feeling that the whole peace of the world depends now on plain speaking and straightforward action, the President deems it his duty to say, without any attempt to soften what may seem harsh words, that the nations of the world do not and cannot trust the word of those who have hitherto been the masters of German policy, and to point out once more that in concluding peace and attempting to undo the infinite injuries and injustices of this war, the Government of the United States cannot deal with any but veritable representatives of the German people, who have been assured of a genuine constitutional standing as the real rulers of Germany. If it must deal with the military masters and the monarchical autocrats of Germany now, or if it is likely to have to

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

deal with them later in regard to the international obligations of the German Empire, it must demand, not peace negotiations but surrender. Nothing can be gained by leaving this essential thing unsaid.'

Germany complained of the threatening obscurity of Wilson's language; but Germany thoroughly understood its meaning. The President came definitely into the open against the Kaiser, 'that personification of German military force'.<sup>1</sup> Between the lines of the Note could be read a definite arraignment of William II. Major Niemann was with the Emperor and Empress when the Note arrived. 'The hypocritical Wilson', he said, 'has at last thrown off the mask.' Little by little, 'the imperial couple's indignation turned to ineffable contempt'.

Thus, the Reich was placed in the cruel dilemma of having to consider whether, if it kept its sovereignty, it would be refused an armistice. It had to choose between the Hohenzollern and peace. 'Capitulation or negotiation—such was the dilemma put before Germany in this Note. They had to see that everything depended on the person of the Emperor.'<sup>2</sup> From now on-

<sup>1</sup> *Memorandum* of General von Plessen, published as an annex to Alfred Niemann: *Revolution von Oben, Umsturz von Unten*, Berlin, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> Emil Ludwig: *Wilhelm der Zweite*, Berlin, 1926, trans. Ethel Colburn Mayne: *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, London, New York, 1926.

wards, the problem of monarchy in Germany had not merely been raised; it had already been solved.

The Social Democrats had no further hesitation in imperatively demanding abdication. As early as 22 October Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Party, had stated in the Reichstag that in demanding the destruction of any 'arbitrary power' capable of troubling the peace of the world, 'President Wilson has done no more than repeat an old socialist slogan definitely formulated by our party in 1908 in an interview with a representative of the *Daily Telegraph*'.<sup>1</sup> Two days later, even before the official text of the third Wilson Note had reached the Wilhelmstrasse,<sup>2</sup> Noske referred in the Reichstag to 'the general opinion in the country, namely, that one single gesture from the wearer of the imperial crown might relieve the pressure now weighing upon millions of people'. *Vorwärts*, the chief organ of the Social Democrats, yet further increased the effect of this remarkable speech by writing: 'The situation is clear. The moment has come to accept the logical consequences of the present

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Ebert: *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden*, Dresden, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> In his private diary, under date of 24 October, Conrad Haussmann, Secretary of State, wrote that the Wilson Note was communicated to him by Noske in the Reichstag at 11 a.m., and he communicated the contents to Solf, his colleague in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs: 'At first Solf doubted the authenticity of the Note. The Press received it before we did.'

distress of the German people.' That great democratic bourgeois paper, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, also broke in the following words the silence imposed on the Press as regards this burning question: 'The Kaiser's speeches have encouraged the opinion abroad that he represents the policy of the mailed fist. He must as soon as possible take a decision which will be of the utmost importance both for peace and for the future of Germany, a decision which might well wash out many things spoken or done in the course of the last few years.'

\* \* \*

The immediate question was, what was going to be the attitude of the Government of the Reich. Although on 4 October Prince Max of Baden had formed the first German Cabinet responsible to Parliament, with the support of representatives of the chief political Parties, including even the Social Democrats, there could nevertheless be no suspicion of lukewarmness in the monarchical sentiments of the Chancellor, of the House of Zechingen, who was the heir to a Grand-Dukedom, and whose incredible genealogy positively bristled with princely crowns. By his mother, he was a grandson of Tsar Nicholas I, and a direct descendant both of Maximilian, first King of Bavaria, and of Eugène de Beauharnais. By his wife, he was cousin german of Tsar Nicholas II and of the Kings of England and Denmark. Fifty-two years of age, he was heir presumptive to the throne of

Baden, since his cousin Grand Duke Frederick II was without issue. He had always maintained the friendliest relations with his cousin the Kaiser. He was general of cavalry in the Prussian army, and had been of service to William II in a most important affair, involving both family and diplomatic considerations. In 1913 the Kaiser's only daughter had married the son of the Duke of Cumberland. The Duke had never recovered the crown of Hanover which had been worn by his father, but when his son became the Emperor's son-in-law the son had been granted the Duchy of Brunswick as the result of some extremely delicate negotiations which had been conducted by Prince Max, who was himself the son-in-law of the Duke of Cumberland. During the war, Prince Max had done useful work in devoting himself almost entirely to Red Cross questions and to the interests of war prisoners. With these philanthropic activities he had managed to combine a certain amount of secret diplomacy, the object of which was to use his family influence to secure for Germany a separate peace with imperial Russia. By this means, and as the result of certain speeches of a liberal tendency, he had acquired the reputation of being in favour of a peace by conciliation and, since 1917, democrats in South Germany—such as Conrad Haussmann with his slogan 'Max equals pax'—had favoured his claims to be Imperial Chancellor. But for various reasons William II took no notice of him until

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

the moment when the storm-cloud of defeat was about to break over Germany.

There is no reason to suppose that at the moment when he assumed the reins of office Prince Max had any conception of the possibility of the Kaiser's abdication. As a measure of prudence, however, he had on 6 October interrogated certain of his Ministers on the question what would be the attitude of the political Parties in the event of this critical question becoming of first importance. Wilhelm Solf, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and his colleague at the Finance Ministry, Count Rødern, thought it inconceivable that the question could be raised. Scheidemann, who was at the time Secretary of State without portfolio, would appear to have replied that the question was a purely internal one.<sup>1</sup>

It was known that the war was lost, but no one in Germany had yet conceived the possibility of complete surrender to the enemy. No one was prepared for utter disaster. The new Chancellor had accustomed himself to the idea that the transformation of the autocratic Imperial Government into a 'popular' Government would be accomplished without difficulty. His desire was to give the people such political rights as were necessary to prevent the rout of the armies at the front from involving the internal disorganisation of the nation. He introduced a Bill providing that no war could be declared and no treaty of peace

<sup>1</sup> K. F. Nowak: *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

concluded without the sanction of the Reichstag. The military authority was subordinated to the civil, universal suffrage introduced into Prussia, and the Chancellor made responsible to Parliament. Each reverse at the front was immediately followed by the grant of some new liberty.<sup>1</sup> But defeat followed defeat so swiftly that the German Government was at pains to find rights enough to confer upon a people which was already well-nigh oppressed with the weight of its liberties.

After the collapse of Bulgaria and Turkey, Austria-Hungary was in full process of disintegration, and an intense agitation shook the German Empire. A profound feeling of mass disappointment gripped the nation and inspired it with anger against rulers who, through four years of unprecedented privations, had promised it victory. Discontented and threatening, the various Parties of the Left came out into the open against the monarchy and against any delay in its abdication. Those convinced republicans the Independent Socialists followed Oscar Cohn in defining the political situation of the Reich in the words: 'Either war with the Hohenzollerns or peace without the Hohenzollerns'; and in concert with Hugo Haase, who was to be assassinated in the following year, they hurled themselves in a violent assault upon the militarist Empire.

On 23 October Max of Baden succumbed to a

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Baumont and Marcel Berthelot: *L'Allemagne, lendemains de guerre et de révolution*, Paris, 1922.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

violent attack of influenza which kept him several days in bed. On the evening of the 24th he was visited by Conrad Haussmann, who had a long conversation with him 'on the subject of His Majesty'. 'For a democrat', he said, 'there is no vital importance in the dynastic question, but a nation cannot exile its emperor at the orders of the enemy.' 'Are those your real feelings?' asked the Prince. 'Yes.' 'I thank you most sincerely' was the reply. The same night Haussmann was present at the Cabinet meeting under the presidency of Von Payer at which the main lines of the reply to President Wilson were laid down. Haussmann objected to making any allusion to the dynastic question, and repeated what he had just said to Prince Max, concluding, 'After the German Note has been sent the Emperor should himself decide without pressure of any kind from the Government'.

Prince Ernst zu Hohenlohe Langenburg, cousin of Max of Baden, who was in charge of a prisoners of war mission at Berne, was personally devoted to the Kaiser, and was even a member of an ultra-patriotic party, the *Vaterlandspartei*, which had been founded by Admiral von Tirpitz. On 25 October he telegraphed to the Chancellor that abdication was the only method of saving the dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, von Treutler, Prussian

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, on 28 October, von Romberg, German Minister at Berne, transmitted to his Government the declarations made by members of the Swiss Federal Council. According to these

## BEFORE ABDICATION

Minister at Munich, telegraphed in the sense that abdication was the only means of saving the dynasty.

Prince Max was profoundly moved. His course was already determined for him. Neither his political foresight nor his political difficulties permitted him to take up any stand in defence of the Emperor. He communicated the two messages in question to the Emperor without comment. He had already decided to secure the Emperor's abdication. On 27 October he received two German officers, one of whom was Lieut.-Colonel Draudt, later to be vice-president of the German Red Cross, who brought him from Switzerland a letter from Prince Hohenlohe Langenburg confirming personally the imperative necessity for abdication. From now onwards he was unable to maintain the reserve on which Haussmann had congratulated him that very day: 'No pressure has been exercised on the Emperor or the Crown Prince by either the Cabinet or Parliament. They have thus respected to the full the prerogatives and the dignity of the imperial crown.'

declarations, there was no possibility of avoiding abdication. The only way in which the Emperor could avoid revolution in Germany was to sacrifice himself and to recommend his grandson to the loyalty of the people and the army. Von Romberg sent several telegrams to the same effect, all of which were published, for the first time probably, in the White Book of 1919 concerning the armistice, *Weissbuch über die Vorgeschichte des Waffenstillstands*.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Rather than take action himself, Max of Baden, who was no fighter and in any case cumbered by his personal loyalty, decided to use others to act for him. On 28 October he attempted to induce certain persons whose loyalty to William II was beyond question—General von Chelius, an ex-aide-de-camp, the Court chaplain Ernst von Dryander, and Count August Eulenburg—Minister of the Royal Household for the last eleven years—to preach abdication to the Emperor, and to ‘dissipate the fog of misunderstanding’ which prevented him from seeing things as they really were. Abdication, they were to say, would save Germany from civil war, and would save the dynasty. The difficulty was to induce anyone to undertake a mission of this kind except under compulsion. The efforts of Prince Max were unsuccessful. But the Kaiser’s entourage was perfectly aware of them, and there was from this moment no doubt as to the ideas and the policy of the Imperial Chancellor.

The Emperor’s immediate entourage was still fed full of illusions. As late as 28 October the Empress was convinced that her husband was beloved by the German people and said so naïvely to the former Chancellor Michaelis.<sup>1</sup> Prince Max’s attitude was construed as a provocation. In these circumstances a vital decision was taken. The object was to protect the Kaiser, who was already seriously troubled, from an invitation

<sup>1</sup> Georg Michaelis, *Für Staat und Volk*, Berlin, 1922.

which the whole Court felt was on the point of being made.

\* \* \*

The 'last act of the Imperial tragedy' <sup>1</sup> began on the evening of 29 October with the departure of the Emperor to G.H.Q. at Spa, a departure which was later compared with Louis XVI's flight to Varennes. At 5 p.m. on the same day Prince Max was apprised of the Emperor's departure by Baron von Grünau, who had for two years been the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attached to the person of the Emperor. Grünau had only just been informed of the Emperor's departure.

The Chancellor was thunderstruck by the news. He immediately sent Solf to Count Eulenburg and to Clemens von Delbrück, the new Chief Civil Private Secretary, to urge them to bring pressure to bear upon the Emperor to remain at Potsdam.

He also tried direct methods. He telephoned to William and communicated to him his utter surprise at his unexpected departure at the very moment when questions of the most vital importance were under consideration. He 'did all he could to prevent' William's departure.<sup>2</sup> The Emperor thought the war situation necessitated

<sup>1</sup> Wahnschaffe, in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 August 1919. Wahnschaffe was Under-Secretary of State in the Chancellery.

<sup>2</sup> *Wilhelm II, Ereignisse und Gestalten*, Berlin, 1922. English ed., *My Memoirs*, 1878-1918, London, 1922. \*

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

immediate decisions and that his place was with his soldiers. The Empress also, he said, had been surprised. G.H.Q. demanded his presence at the front. When Prince Max insisted, the Emperor replied: 'You've thrown out Ludendorff and it's up to me to support his successor Gröner at the beginning.' In spite of his illness, Prince Max demanded an interview with the Emperor, but the doctors forbade the Kaiser to receive the Prince for fear of infection.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, said the doctors, the Prince was ill, and should take care of himself. The upshot of the whole conversation was a polite but categorical refusal to grant an interview. When Prince Max reiterated that it was impossible that the Emperor could absent himself from the Capital in such serious circumstances, William II asserted that 'all may yet be well if my advice is followed'. In a note to Solf, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, he

<sup>1</sup> Prince Max of Baden: *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, Berlin, 1927, trans. W. M. Calder and C. W. H. Sutton, 2 vols., London, 1928. It seems clear that the Emperor was inventing excuses to avoid receiving the Chancellor. It should nevertheless be remembered that William II had the reputation of being extremely nervous of infectious or epidemic diseases. One of his earlier Court-Marshals, Zedlitz-Trützschler, a most keen and critical observer, tells us how the Emperor refused to visit one of his sons during an attack of pneumonia, and although pneumonia is an entirely non-infectious disease, held no communication with the Empress except in the open air during the whole time that she was nursing the prince. (*Zwölf Jahre am deutschen Kaiserhof*, Berlin, 1924.)

recommended a change in the general direction of German foreign policy. Peace efforts should be directed towards Great Britain. 'As a final resource I shall announce my abdication.' 'This was his last decisive action. From now on, his part was played, and he became the mere puppet of events.'<sup>1</sup>

The Chancellor thought that G.H.Q. had really demanded the Emperor's presence. William II had told him so, and tells the same story in his *Memoirs*: 'It was in response to the request of the army.'<sup>2</sup> The same story had been told to Grünau by Major Niemann and by General von Marschall, the Emperor's Chief Military Private Secretary, to the Minister of War. For a long time the legend persisted that G.H.Q. had been responsible for the Emperor's removal to Spa with the object of maintaining him at all costs in power.<sup>3</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Emperor's arrival took Spa by surprise.<sup>4</sup> It was inevitable that he

<sup>1</sup> William Martin: *Les Hommes d'Etat pendant la Guerre*, Paris, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> As late as 1924 William II asserted that in going to Spa he was conforming to the urgent request of Marshal Hindenburg—Alfred Niemann, *Wanderungen mit Kaiser Wilhelm II*, Leipzig, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> This accusation was pressed with great vehemence on 9 August 1919 by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. According to Emil Ludwig, the army commanders virtually kidnapped William II: 'For it was a kind of kidnapping', and the Emperor became 'the prisoner of G.H.Q. and of his generals'.

<sup>4</sup> In explanation of the Emperor's arrival the Chief Quarter-Master General Gröner, who had just succeeded Ludendorff,

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

and his escort should be a source of embarrassment to the army command. William II said to Admiral von Hintze, who represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at G.H.Q.: 'Prince Max's government is trying to throw me out. At Berlin I should be less able to oppose them than in the midst of my troops.'<sup>1</sup> Spa seemed safer to him than his capital.

Von Payer, the Vice-Chancellor, recalls the profound depression caused in well-informed circles by this move, 'which was little better than a flight'; 'fortunately, public opinion did not pay much attention to it'. It was not until after the lapse of several days that the German Press began to comment on the departure for Spa. Like von Payer, Max of Baden observed: 'Public opinion took less notice of the Emperor's journey than had been feared. It was none the less clear that the Emperor's movements were dictated by his desire to keep the crown, and the campaign of abdication entered upon a livelier phase.'

In the eyes of a people which was yearning for peace, William II appeared the chief obstacle to the realisation of their wishes. His refusal to was told that General Scheuch, the Minister of War, had confided to General Marschall that it was impossible to guarantee the Emperor's security at Potsdam. Marschall and Scheuch both denied this, and Major Niemann who spread the story also withdrew it—*Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden*.

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of Von Hintze, handed at the beginning of 1919 to the Minister of the Royal Household; reproduced as an annex to Niemann's *Revolution von Oben*.

abdicate seemed likely to delay the conclusion of the armistice and to expose the Reich to fresh perils. The general discontent grew 'from hour to hour', more markedly in certain towns, such as Kiel, than at Berlin.<sup>1</sup> It was not thought that all the thrones of the Confederate States of the Empire were fated to disappear. It could not be supposed that Bavaria would be the first State to proclaim the republic;<sup>2</sup> but there was a very strong current of opinion, even outside the Socialist Party, which had set in favour of the Emperor's abdication.

Even the most cautious elements of the Press began to show signs of an unusual daring. From the end of October they frequently came out with the headline 'The Question of the Kaiser'. The character and policy of the Sovereign became the objects of freer and freer criticism. In the general clamour of the Press the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* declared that the idea of the Emperor was incompatible with the requirements of the new era. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* bitterly reproached the monarch for not having abdicated. 'For the last fortnight, or even month,' it said, 'Germany has risked destruction for the sake of one man.'

In a letter of 29 October, Scheidemann, the

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, Berlin, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> William II confided to Major Niemann (see the latter's *Wanderungen*) that the triumph of the revolutionary movement in monarchist Bavaria had made the deepest possible impression on him.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Secretary of State, requested the Chancellor to submit the question of abdication to the Cabinet and to demand 'voluntary retirement' on the part of the Emperor. 'The great majority of the population', he said, 'is convinced that the chances of obtaining tolerable armistice and peace conditions have been compromised by the maintenance of the Emperor in his high position. . . . The peace negotiations will appear in a much more favourable light if the change of government, which is now a *fait accompli* in Germany, is clearly emphasised by a change in the supreme position in the Reich. . . . This measure cannot be evaded. The Emperor must, and as soon as possible, bear the consequences of the general situation.'

On the following morning, 30 October, Prince Max invited Scheidemann to visit him in his room, to which he was still confined by influenza. He urgently begged Scheidemann to withdraw his letter, asserting that he would do his utmost to bring home the situation to the Emperor. He was more likely, he said, to obtain a voluntary retirement if no such strong and open pressure was brought to bear upon the Emperor. He promised to do everything in his power to bring about abdication. On these conditions Scheidemann agreed to withdraw his letter, but added that there was now no time to be lost. He could not remain in the Government if a decision were not taken at the earliest possible moment.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

On the same day the Chancellor was informed of the opinion expressed by Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, German Minister at Copenhagen and future Minister of Foreign Affairs of the German Republic: If abdication was delayed, he said, the Reich would be unable to offer any resistance to dishonourable armistice conditions. Abdication seemed inevitable if courage and a sense of responsibility were to be implanted in the nation.

\* \* \*

In the morning of 31 October, the Chancellor received Prince August Wilhelm, one of the Emperor's sons, who had remained at Potsdam with the Empress. Max endeavoured to make the Prince understand that the Emperor should retire before he was compelled to do so. August Wilhelm maintains <sup>1</sup> that he asserted that the Chancellor alone was qualified to advise the Emperor to abdicate. Max of Baden replied, he said, that he could not give such advice 'to a relation and a friend', and that moreover he was too ill to bear the emotional strain involved. Upon which August Wilhelm states that he advised him to retire since his work was too important for a sick man to do. In his *Memoirs* Max of Baden denies that August Wilhelm used any such language to him, but admits that the Kaiser's son probably did not understand him.

<sup>1</sup> In his diary, which is quoted by Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*, August Wilhelm asserts that he was summoned to the Chancellery.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

In any case, the interview caused the disappearance of a plan which had been conceived by Walter Simons, the Chancellor's chief assistant and then a high official in the Foreign Office, of which he was to become Head in 1920. The plan was that during the minority of the eldest son of the Crown Prince, Prince August Wilhelm should be regent in Prussia and Prince Max of Baden Lieutenant-General of the Empire (*Reichsverweser*). Haussmann, Secretary of State, to whom the plan had been divulged on 29 October, had very strongly advised Prince Max to refuse so onerous a task. The regent of Prussia should, he said, be also Lieutenant-General of the Empire. Prince Max had warmly thanked Haussmann for his friendly advice; but he would seem to have retained the idea that, in the public interest, his duty might one day impose upon him functions of this kind.

On the morning of 31 October Prince Max raised the question of abdication at a Cabinet meeting. According to Scheidemann, he raised the question 'without beating about the bush'.<sup>1</sup> There was, according to Scheidemann, considerable discussion of the question whether or no the Allies would exact abdication, and above all, whether President Wilson was in favour of it. In Prince Max's view, abdication could be contemplated only as the spontaneous act of the monarch. Just as the Prince claimed liberty of

<sup>1</sup> Scheidemann: *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin, 1921.

action for the Emperor, so he claimed it for the Chancellor.

Scheidemann held that the best solution would be that the Emperor should retire as soon as possible. Count Rædern, who was Secretary of State at the Ministry of Finance, wished to know the views of Dr. Solf, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was not present at the meeting. Dr. Solf was accordingly sent for.

A day or two earlier,<sup>1</sup> the Minister of Foreign Affairs had received bitter complaints from the Emperor, who urged that an official protest should be issued against the rumours of abdication. Solf pointed out that abdication was being freely spoken of not only at the street corners, but even in the best society. To soothe the Emperor's indignation he was diplomatic enough to add, 'If Your Majesty goes I shall go too. I cannot continue to serve under such conditions.'<sup>2</sup>

At the Cabinet meeting Solf stated that the

<sup>1</sup> In telling the story of this scene in his *Memoirs*, William II said that he complained of the whole question to Solf, shortly before the despatch of the last German Note to Wilson, *i.e.* before 27 October.

<sup>2</sup> William II concludes as follows: 'I went, or—to put it more correctly—I was overthrown by my own Government; and—Herr Solf remained.' Solf, who had been Minister of the Colonies since 1911, succeeded von Hintze at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 1918. After the revolution he remained for a few weeks at the head of that Ministry, until he was replaced by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau. Later he was German Ambassador in Japan until his retirement in 1928.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Wilson Notes, while not absolutely demanding abdication, demanded it in general terms. Abdication would mean the disappearance of the outward and visible sign of German militarism. Wilson's authority with the Entente Powers would be enhanced if he brought about the fall of the Emperor; but his demand was for 'a change of system', not for a change of persons.<sup>1</sup>

The Cabinet was seriously divided, 'naturally enough, in a matter in which sentiment bulked so large'.<sup>2</sup> The Democrats followed Solf. Von Payer, the Vice-Chancellor, and Hausmann, the Secretary of State, thought abdication desirable and even inevitable. They pointed out that, even in undoubtedly monarchist circles, abdication was desired with the object of obtaining better conditions of peace and of saving the monarchy. Within Germany itself abdication would go far to solve the difficulties with which the Government was faced. Abroad it would to some extent temper the suspicion with which Germany's enemies regarded her. 'Whether it be war or peace, the Kaiser should abdicate. The war can be continued only if he has abdicated. Otherwise the German people will think that the war is being continued solely on behalf of the Emperor, and all enthusiasm for it will disappear. If, on the other

<sup>1</sup> Scheidemann: *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin, 1921; Erzberger: *Erlaubnisse im Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich von Payer: *Von Bethmann Hollweg bis Ebert*, Frankfurt, 1923.

hand, it is to be peace, the conditions of peace will be heavier if the Emperor does not abdicate.'<sup>1</sup>

The Democrats, who were in favour of abdication, rejected any idea of deposition. Their view was that the Emperor should voluntarily abdicate, but they refused to depose him by force. 'There can be no value or dignity in abdication unless it is spontaneous. One supreme sacrifice carried through in the interests of peace and of the German people would ensure the Sovereign his full meed of recognition.'<sup>2</sup>

Several Ministers pronounced against abdication. 'The Catholic centre', it was said, 'cannot demand the abdication of a Protestant Hohenzollern.' Gröner opposed abdication with violence, Trimborn with moderation. Erzberger took the view that it would be 'more honourable to yield to pressure from outside than to show the Emperor the door'; he recalled a conversation which he had recently had with a republican in a neutral country: 'If the Emperor is compelled by the people to abdicate, foreigners will say of Germany that the nation is brutal in victory and contemptible in defeat.' With unwelcome logic he pointed to the example given by Greece in the matter of King Constantine. He did not agree that time

<sup>1</sup> Haussmann declares that he used this language to Prince Max on 29 October. On the same day he discussed the question with Scheuch, the Minister of War, and the ex-Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg.

<sup>2</sup> Haussmann, *op. cit.*

pressed. He thought Germany should wait to see if the Entente would impose conditions so harsh that abdication would become a necessity.

Similar arguments were put forward by the National Liberal, Friedberg, Vice-President of the Prussian Ministry. General Scheuch, Minister of War, expressed the fear that the Emperor's departure might undermine the moral of the army. The Cabinet took no decision. It had succeeded in doing nothing but making a show of its divisions, hesitations and utter uncertainty.

The Chancellor held that abdication was the only course which now remained for William II. In the afternoon of 31 October he summoned four of his ministers to a secret consultation. These were Payer, Solf, Friedberg and Scheuch, together with Drews, the Prussian Minister of the Interior, who had been in office for fourteen months and was 'an incarnation of the best traditions of Prussian officialdom'.

Solf came out into the open and emphasised the effect which would be produced by abdication on the United States, which understood nothing of the constitutional changes in the Reich, but which would be deeply struck by such a 'symbolical gesture'. Payer pointed out that South Germany was arrayed against the Emperor. Drews asserted, not without emotion, that the national defence could not be continued 'so long as the working classes and a great proportion of the middle classes consider the person of the monarch to

## BEFORE ABDICATION

be an obstacle to peace'. Friedberg and General Scheuch, however, remained opponents of abdication, and continued the debate.

With great insistence and enthusiasm Drews urged that William should be forced to abdicate. He was sure that he was acting in the interests of the monarch himself, and in the hope of a regency. Prince Max therefore begged Drews to proceed to Spa in order to acquaint his King with the facts of the position. Count Lerchenfeld, Bavarian Minister at Berlin, was prepared to accompany Drews<sup>1</sup>; but he was unable to obtain the necessary authorisation from his Government.

The historian Max Weber has reproached Prince Max with having wasted time 'through dynastic sentimentality'. But the Chancellor had to consider the wishes of the Sovereign, who was opposed to abdication. He could have gone quicker in the matter only if he had had no hesitations or divergence of views in his Cabinet, or if, when all was settled and determined in advance, an agreement had been come to almost without discussion.

On the morning of 1 November Prince Max went to the Bavarian Legation to meet the plenipotentiaries of the Confederate States. He told them that the question of abdication was under

<sup>1</sup> Later William II was to tell Niemann that on 20 October Lerchenfeld had said to him: 'If Wilson demands abdication you will have to agree.' (*Wanderungen*.)



consideration by the Cabinet and requested them to obtain the views of their Governments as soon as possible. The voluntary abdication of the Emperor would be accompanied by the renunciation of the throne on the part of the Crown Prince. A Prussian prince of the Imperial family would become regent during the minority of the Crown Prince's eldest son. But the difficulties in the way of the appointment of a regent were considerable: 'No one in the Imperial family could be regarded as at the same time fit for such a place and as enjoying, even to a moderate extent, the confidence of the country.'<sup>1</sup>

The Chancellor promised to advise the Emperor to abdicate. His views were shared by the majority of the members of the *Bundesrat*, in particular, by the representative of Bavaria. Certain members expressed the fear that the measures contemplated were not adequate to meet the danger in time.

At the request of the Chancellor, his cousin, Prince Frederick Charles of Hesse, came to Berlin. Frederick Charles had a double tie with the Hohenzollerns; through his wife he was the brother-in-law of William II, and through his mother a great-nephew of William I. He was perfectly ready to proceed to Spa.<sup>2</sup> Simons was to accompany him on the evening of 1 November.

<sup>1</sup> Von Payer: *Von Bethmann Hollweg bis Ebert*, Frankfurt, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> The Grand Duke of Hesse, who had also been approached in the matter, refused to act.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

The Chancellor's idea was that William II should address the people and the army in a tone of chivalry calculated to touch all hearts: 'The hate which my enemies bear me is likely to aggravate the conditions of the armistice and of the peace. I cannot consent to this, and I therefore abdicate. But when I am gone, Germany must not be humiliated. After four years of heroic fighting, her army must not be compelled to accept dishonourable conditions. Show your enemies that you are ready to defend yourselves with all your force and at the cost of any sacrifice.' This was the general idea developed by Simons in two draft proclamations addressed to the army and to the people.

After a series of interviews the Prince of Hesse abandoned the idea of proceeding to Spa, pleading the disastrous effect which abdication would have on the army. It was in vain that Max of Baden insisted and that Simons ragingly prophesied that 'Germany will have a republic since the representatives of monarchy are backing out of their responsibilities'.

The Chancellor was now exhausted by overwork and emotional strain. On the evening of 1 November he suffered a relapse. The sedative which had to be administered to him kept him asleep for nearly thirty-six hours, and it was not until the close of the day of 3 November that he resumed his duties.

Politically his position was seriously shaken.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

He had incurred the hatred of the Emperor<sup>1</sup> by pressing for abdication and by refusing to authorise the publication of a liberal proclamation from which the Sovereign expected the best results. On 28 October William II had sent him a draft couched in terms of the warmest sympathy for democracy. The Emperor solemnly accepted the new era of reform inaugurated by the first parliamentary Government. 'The Emperor entrusts the people with the fundamental rights which will guarantee them a future of happiness and freedom. . . . The Emperor's task will be to serve his people.'

Clearly the object was to meet the campaign for abdication by promising that the Emperor would co-operate in a system of democratic government. The Chancellor was embarrassed by this proclamation with its tone of liberalism. His idea was that 'an attitude of reserve would be the best protection for the Kaiser'. The ministers were divided. Erzberger agreed with Wahnschaffe in favouring the immediate publication of the manifesto. Friedberg, on the other hand, was afraid that the sincerity of the monarch might be called into question. Payer thought it would be dangerous to attract general attention to the Emperor. The Chancellor postponed publication, which did not take place until 3 November, after the receipt of an urgent telegram from

<sup>1</sup> Hintze's Memorandum,

## BEFORE ABDICATION

William II and a personal letter from the Empress.<sup>1</sup>

Max of Baden was convinced that if at this date he had offered his resignation, as he had done on 25 October in demanding the retirement of Ludendorff, the resignation would have been joyfully accepted. Already, Scheidemann was being approached and asked whether, if he became Chancellor, he could avoid the necessity for abdication.

\* \* \*

On 1 November Drews was received by the Emperor. 'His explanation of the position', writes William II, 'was tantamount to suggesting to me that I should myself arrive at the conclusion that abdication was necessary, provided that the Government did not appear to have exercised any pressure upon me.' The Emperor was only too prepared for a suggestion of this kind. He could not contain his indignation until the end of the interview. 'I pointed out the fatal consequences of abdication and asked him how a Prussian official could reconcile such a mission with the oath taken to his king. "How comes it", I said, "that you, a Prussian minister, could have accepted such a mission?" He appeared greatly embarrassed, and excused himself by the orders of the Chancellor. He ventured timidly to defend himself, stating that he

<sup>1</sup> In his *Memoirs* William II states that he knew nothing of this letter until later on.

had thought it his duty to accept the mission in the general interest.<sup>1</sup>

The Emperor instructed the Minister to tell the Chancellor that, in accordance with his duty, he would remain at his post. His sons had all promised him to refuse the regency, and if he abdicated the army would dissolve.

Marshal Hindenburg and the Chief Quartermaster-General, Gröner, were called into consultation. They both approved the attitude of the Emperor and supported him warmheartedly. The Marshal asserted that after abdication the army would be no more than a band of marauders and brigands straggling back into Germany.<sup>2</sup> Gröner stated that the unfortunate moral in the interior of the country, which was undermining the moral of the army, must be attributed mainly to the inaction of the Government. Nothing was being done to stimulate the will to resistance, to induce confidence in victory, to prevent enemy Press propaganda or the defeatist campaign in the German Press. The Chief Quartermaster-General expressed himself with blunt ferocity. He 'took the minister's breath away'.<sup>3</sup> Drews

<sup>1</sup> Hintze's Memorandum: Hintze was not present at the interview, but recorded it according to the account given of it by the Emperor. According to Drews' friends, on the other hand, the Minister would appear to have been very firm.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs* of Prince Max of Baden.

<sup>3</sup> Hintze's Memorandum: According to Drews' friends, the Minister replied energetically to Gröner's reproaches.

was supposed to be hard of hearing, and the Emperor observed that 'they all shouted so loud that he could not have missed a word'. The Emperor was extremely satisfied with the attitude of Gröner, who was a Wurtemberger, and could not do enough to express his pleasure at it. With his eyes 'sparkling with joy', he said to Major Niemann: 'How splendid to see the peaceable Gröner so carried away, and how happy I was to see a South German so ready to defend the Emperor and the King of Prussia.'

He took leave of the Minister with the words: 'A Wurtemberger has had to show you what is the proper conduct of a Prussian patriot.' He then soothed Drews after the 'frank' language of General Gröner, and refused his offer of resignation.

The Drews mission <sup>1</sup> had an unfortunate result. It exacerbated the already strained relations between the Emperor and his Chancellor. Grünau alludes to 'the bad feeling produced by the Minister's mission'. Later developments did not protect Drews against the resentment of William II. The Emperor never forgave him, and notes in his *Memoirs* that Drews was 'one of the first officials to speak of the abdication of his Master and King'.

On 7 November, at a Cabinet meeting, Scheidemann was to assert that the Emperor had said to Drews, 'I shall yield only to force', and he then

<sup>1</sup> The Press referred to it several days later, though before the revolution.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

added: 'If the Emperor has held such language, the situation is the more serious and the result is inevitable. I do not know if the young classes would fire on the people. The older classes will not.' Prince Max attaches great importance to the effect of these words attributed to William II: 'I shall yield only to force.'

In any case, the words would seem to have represented the Emperor's conviction. On 2 November he confided to Hintze that he had drawn up a plan for marching troops into Germany. After the armistice he would be able to place the troops at the disposal of the Government for the re-establishment of order. 'We shall soon see', he said, 'whether England will lend a hand in crushing Bolshevism.' In any case he himself would remain at his post. He would not abandon the German people at such a critical moment. He would recapture Prussia and his Capital or die on the field of battle.

On 4 November he told the Crown Prince of Bavaria that he could not 'renounce a duty which had been assigned to him by God'. If he was overthrown, Germany, he said, would soon see what would become of her.<sup>1</sup>

He categorically refused to abdicate.

<sup>1</sup> Rupprecht of Bavaria: *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Munich, 1929.

## II

*The Revolution at Kiel—General Groner at Berlin—The Seventh and Eighth of November: Attitude of the Social Democratic Party—The Chancellor's Policy—Admiral von Hintze—Final Efforts of Prince Max.*

THE policy of prolonging a vain resistance by methods of delay was the sure means of provoking an internal explosion. The outbreak happened at Kiel.<sup>1</sup>

The German Admiralty decided to attempt the impossible in preparing to risk a decisive action against the British fleet. On the evening of 3 November Admiral von Mann, Secretary of State at the Admiralty, informed the Chancellor of certain serious events which were the forerunners of the revolution. On several vessels the crews had mutinied at sea on 29 and 30 October, and Admiral von Hipper had been able to restore order only by threatening to torpedo the vessels in ques-

<sup>1</sup> The Kiel insurrection was not known in Germany until several days after it happened, and its extreme gravity was successfully hidden for the same period both in the Reich and abroad. In his *Memoirs* Noske observes that news concerning events at Kiel was held back to the utmost possible extent. *Le Temps* did not refer to the troubles at Kiel until 8 November, and its news, which was founded upon an account in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, gave no indication of the extent to which the revolutionary movement had spread in the navy. It is clear that this delay was of vital importance at the moment, when the armistice negotiations were in their earliest stages.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

tion, the destroyer flotilla having remained loyal. A number of mutineers had been put in irons.

During the morning of 4 November the Minister brought yet more alarming news concerning the troubles and mutinies in the fleet. There could be no doubt that the whole fleet was utterly disgusted with the war. On its return to Kiel the Third Squadron was in open rebellion. On 1 November the sailors had demanded that their comrades in detention should be set at liberty. On 2 November all discipline was lost. The dock-workers and part of the garrison made common cause with the sailors. The situation was going from bad to worse, and blood had already been shed.

The Cabinet at once decided to send Haussmann, the Secretary of State, to Kiel, accompanied by Gustav Noske, a member of the Reichstag, as the representative of Social Democracy. These two arrived at Kiel at 7.30 p.m. on 4 November, and found the town in the hands of the insurgents. The Governor had been unable to resist and had been taken completely unawares by the revolt.<sup>1</sup> The Governor was Admiral Souchon, who had, at the outset of the war, commanded the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* in the Mediterranean.

As a Social Democrat, Noske was received with acclamation at the station, and the motor-car provided for his use was decorated with a red flag. He at once opened negotiations with the workers,

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Noske: *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, Berlin, 1920.

sailors and soldiers, and brought some order into chaos by introducing sound elements into a Workers' Council which had been set up on the Russian model.

Hausmann returned to Berlin in the evening of 5 November. He had joined with Noske in promising an amnesty. But the Ministers of Marine and of War, together with Erzberger, were opposed to any such course. The Government had conceived an altogether erroneous idea of the events at Kiel. Hausmann then hinted at resignation, and on the following day the Cabinet accepted the principle of amnesty.

All the ships at Kiel had hoisted the red flag, with the exception of the *Schlesien*, which had run away. The captain of the *Koenig* was killed, together with another officer who was endeavouring to prevent the old Imperial flag from being hauled down. But Noske succeeded in establishing his authority in the great port, into which at that time about 80,000 men of the navy and the army were crowded. He got himself proclaimed Governor, established himself in Admiral Souchon's office, and in his new duties proved himself worthy of the reputation for energy which he had won through the candour of his speech and his immense physical strength.

Kiel had given the signal. On 5 November its example was followed without resistance by Lübeck, and on 6 November by Hamburg, after a fusillade which cost nine workers their lives.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Riot followed riot with disconcerting rapidity. From the ports the movement began to extend to north-western Germany. Hanover, Brunswick, Cologne, etc., fell into the hands of Councils of Workers and Soldiers, while on 7 November at Munich the socialist writer, Kurt Eisner, amid the acclamations of the crowd and at the head of the soldiery, assumed the executive power and proclaimed the Republic of Bavaria. The drama was hastening to its crisis.

\* \* \*

Such was the desperate situation with which General Gröner was faced during his stay at Berlin on 5 and 6 November. Appointed Chief Quartermaster-General on 28 October, he had, at the age of fifty-one, to take up the heavy task of succeeding Ludendorff. He had come from the Ukraine, where for eight months he had been Chief of Staff of an army group, and had organised the railway transport of Russian grain and cattle to Germany. His reputation as an organiser stood high. He was a Wurtemberger, and attached to the Staff. Later he was to become Minister of Transport of the Reich from 1920-3, and Minister of the Reichswehr in 1928. When the war broke out he was a lieutenant-colonel in charge of the German Field Railway Service, and the admirably smooth working of the German railway system was attributed largely to his energy and sense of method. After promotion to the rank of full colonel and then general, he was

## BEFORE ABDICATION

put in charge in May 1916 of the Army Food Supply Department, and in October 1916 of the *Kriegsamt* entrusted with the execution of the economic programme drawn up by Marshal Hindenburg when he took over the Supreme Command, for the purpose of a general intensification of production. Since the summer of 1917 he had commanded first a division and then an army corps on the western front, until he went to the Ukraine, where he remained until his arrival at Spa on 30 October 1918.

On 5 November General Gröner visited Berlin at the request of the Chancellor, who relied upon him to dissipate the illusions of G.H.Q. and to make the Kaiser see reality. But in his conversations and statements the General showed himself fiercely opposed to abdication. 'He was utterly devoted to the cause of the Emperor.'<sup>1</sup> To the Secretaries of State in conclave he exclaimed loudly: 'The Marshal would think himself the lowest of the low if he abandoned the Emperor. That is my view too, and a view which is shared by all soldiers who have the least conception of honour. . . . If the campaign against the Kaiser continues it will be all over with the army, which will disband. In that case the re-entry of the soldiery into Germany will be attended by scenes of the most unparalleled brutality.' In a private interview with Gröner,

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Max of Baden vainly attempted to point out to him the inevitable necessity of abdication. 'It seemed to me', said Max, 'that the General was bound by a promise made at Spa that he would not give way.'

Towards midday of 6 November General Gröner met the leaders of the Social Democratic Party and of the trade unions, who had been summoned to the Chancellery. Ebert was there, together with the Socialists in Prince Max's Cabinet, Scheidemann, Secretary of State without portfolio, Bauer, Minister of Labour, and David, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; also the influential trade unionists, Legien, Robert Schmidt and Südekum. Gröner had collaborated on friendly terms with the trade unions in 1916-17 in carrying out Hindenburg's economic programme.

With glacial calm Ebert pointed out that abdication was necessary. 'Rightly or wrongly,' he said, 'the German people have laid the responsibility for their collapse upon the Emperor. His abdication must be announced to-morrow at latest, and one of his sons, either Oscar or Eitel Fritz, should act for him. The Crown Prince is so unpopular with the people that he is out of the question in present circumstances.' Personally, said Ebert, he was inclined to agree to a monarchical empire, based upon the trade unions, and controlled by a parliamentary system. The last opportunity of saving the monarchy would be to

## BEFORE ABDICATION

entrust one of the Imperial princes with the regency.

Gröner replied that there could be no question of abdication. When the army was engaged in a bitter struggle against the enemy it was impossible to remove its supreme head. Military considerations should be supreme. He firmly refused to take any steps whatsoever in the direction of abdication or even to broach the question to the Emperor.

David, Südekum and Legien pressed the necessity of abdication, David in an 'academic discourse', and Südekum on a pathetic note, which 'brought tears to his eyes'. But Gröner maintained his view that Ebert's proposal could not be discussed. All the sons of William II had bound themselves to decline the honour of the regency if their father was forced to abdicate.

In such circumstances, said Ebert, discussion was useless and events must be left to follow their course. Gröner carried away from this interview the impression that the Emperor's abdication could not be long delayed.<sup>1</sup> Later on, he expressed regret that he had rejected the proposal

<sup>1</sup> This impression was contained in a Memorandum published on 27 July 1919, the authenticity of which is vouched for by Hindenburg, Generals Plessen, Marschall and Schulenburg, and Admiral von Hintze. General Gröner took no part in the drafting of this memorandum, the publication of which led to observations from Wahnschaffe, Under-Secretary of State at the Chancellery, Scheuch, the Minister of War, Prince Max, and others.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

of the Social Democrats who did not consider the distinction between a monarchy and a republic to be an essential one. By collaboration with Ebert he might perhaps, he thought, have saved the monarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Before his departure from Berlin in the afternoon of 6 November, Gröner saw the Chancellor. He had been overwhelmed by his interview with the trade union leaders. The revolution, he saw, was close at hand. But he still refused to discuss abdication, and expressed the view that the Emperor should sacrifice not his throne but his life, or should at the least expose his life. An act of heroism of this kind would raise the national moral and close the mouths of all those who were continuously repeating that the Emperor was responsible for all the misfortunes of Germany. 'I was convinced', was the Chancellor's simple reply, 'that His Majesty's entourage would prefer abdication.'

On 6 November G.H.Q. once again informed the troops on the western front that for the army no dynastic problem existed. The army was arrayed behind the Kaiser, who was the symbol of the national resistance. Whatever happened the army would remain faithful to its oath. 'Until 6 November the Emperor was seconded by G.H.Q., and on that day was abandoned by it.'<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> 29 October 1925. Gröner's evidence at the Munich trial, October–November 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1924.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

The impatience and irritability of the Social Democrats, who were obsessed with the idea of peace, grew in proportion as it became apparent that the Chancellor was incapable of bringing about a voluntary abdication of the Emperor. From the Left the Social Democrats were assaulted by the Independent Socialists and the Spartacists, who conducted an intensive campaign. They were still powerful enough to prevent a general strike on 4 November which had been engineered by the Independents, but they stated that they could no longer keep their men under control unless a rapid decision was taken in favour of abdication.

There was much unrest in Berlin. William II became most unpopular for seeking to delay the denouement for which public opinion clamoured. In reply to Max of Baden, who said that 'the question of the Emperor' would be settled after the armistice, Scheidemann said on 5 November that that would certainly be too late. On 6 November he reminded the Cabinet that he had already on several occasions expressed himself on the point with complete lucidity. In the evening he urged his Party to leave the Government with his Socialist colleagues if the Emperor had not abdicated within the next twenty-four hours. Social Democracy, he said, could not take the responsibility for the delays which the Cabinet was tolerating. It would be compelled to make some effort to retain its popularity with the people



who were going over in large numbers to the Independents. The majority of the leaders were in favour of waiting a little longer. But the Party as a whole was divided, distracted and without a policy.

On 7 November the Party held a further meeting which this time was decisive. Scheidemann urged the Socialists to abandon the Government. He was energetically supported by Wels and Braun and, despite David, their views carried the day. It was decided that the Emperor must abdicate by midday, 8 November, at latest.

Before this meeting, early in the morning, the Chancellor had seen the two Socialist leaders in whom he reposed confidence, Ebert and, later, David. Scheidemann inspired him with deep distrust. His temperament, said the Prince, was so difficult to reckon upon or restrain when the wind of revolution was blowing. The masses, he said, exercised on Scheidemann 'an influence comparable to that which he exercises upon them'.<sup>1</sup>

Prince Max decided to leave for Spa. He inquired of Ebert whether, when abdication was proclaimed, he could expect to have him at his side 'in the fight against the social revolution'.

<sup>1</sup> Scheidemann was annoyed at the criticisms levelled at him in Prince Max's *Memoirs*, and after having let him down easily in his own book, *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin, 1921, was very severe upon him in his *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Dresden, 1928.

Ebert unhesitatingly replied, 'I do not want the social revolution. I hate it like poison.' It was Ebert's hope that after abdication Social Democracy would array itself on the side of the Government. David was even more encouraging. Max suggested Prince Eitel Fritz, the Emperor's second son, as a possible regent, since the crown was to pass to the eldest son of the Crown Prince. Ebert promised that his party would cause no difficulties 'in these constitutional questions'. David observed that many Socialists would prefer 'a democratic monarchy' to a republic. The Prince was convinced that he had succeeded in concluding with the Social Democrats a covenant or alliance which would save Germany from a revolution.

His consternation was extreme when, at 5 p.m. on 7 November, Scheidemann and Ebert brought him the ultimatum of the Social Democrats, which demanded the withdrawal of the Emperor and the Crown Prince before midday on 8 November. Scheidemann and Ebert declared that 'the Emperor must abdicate immediately. The alternative is immediate revolution'. 'Wounded and full of bitterness', the Chancellor replied that the whole foundations of his Government were now undermined. His colleagues in the Ministry were completely taken by surprise by the 'violently subversive aims' of the Social Democrats.<sup>1</sup>

In reality the Socialist ultimatum represented not

<sup>1</sup> Conrad Haussmann: *Schlaglichten, Reichtagsbriefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Frankfurt, 1924.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

a daring blow struck at the Imperial power, but the action of a Party which had been carried away by events beyond the control of men. The leaders of Socialism were filled with a sudden terror when they saw that they had lost their influence with the masses. In order not to be carried away by the popular discontent they decided to direct the movement themselves from Berlin. The same evening Ebert confided to Simons that immediate action was necessary if the Independent Socialists were not to draw everyone over to their side. 'A revolutionary gesture is necessary in order to forestall the revolution.'<sup>1</sup>

Prince Max gave up the idea of visiting Imperial Headquarters and, in profound disturbance of mind, sent his resignation to the Kaiser in writing:

'To His Majesty, the Kaiser and King,

'Your Majesty knows that the so-called War Cabinet has, in spite of my most earnest and insistent warnings, for some time been making the August Person a subject of discussion. . . . I [therefore] read the Cabinet a declaration to the effect that I would neither permit pressure to be exercised on Your Majesty in the question of abdication, nor would myself yield to such pressure in advising Your Majesty. . . .'

After emphasising the disastrous nature of the ultimatum which Ebert and Scheidemann had launched, the Prince concluded:

<sup>1</sup> Prince Max.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

'In these circumstances, it is impossible to preserve the unity of the present Government any longer. The majority of the members of the Cabinet . . . take up an attitude of opposition to the Social Democratic step. Since I can only administer the affairs of the Empire so long as I enjoy the confidence . . . of a majority in the Reichstag . . . I beg Your Majesty . . . to relieve me of my office as Imperial Chancellor. I naturally regard it as my duty to retain in my hands the conduct of Imperial affairs at this time of stress, especially as the armistice negotiations which are in progress might be endangered by a breach in the continuity of Government.'

Prince Max informed the Vice-Chancellor von Payer of his resignation and begged him to call a meeting of the Cabinet for the purpose of hearing the news. At this meeting, at which von Payer presided, the 'bourgeois' Ministers bitterly reproached Scheidemann for his policy. The Social Democrats, cried Count Røedern, must bear before history the responsibility of overthrowing the Government at the outset of negotiations with the enemy. Payer also was most outspoken. 'It is impossible to bring about abdication over the telephone in twenty-four hours. The Socialists are making all collaboration with them impossible. Decent people do not behave like that.' The chorus of blame and criticism was swelled by Haussmann and Self.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Scheidemann, in his defence, took the offensive: 'Events are going from bad to worse. The revolutionary movement is too quick for us, and the Emperor is responsible. For some weeks now he must have known what it was his duty to do. There is not a single Minister who would not have been relieved if the Emperor had done the right thing in time. The revolution will be upon us if abdication does not come at once.' Scheidemann expressed the hope that Max of Baden would remain in power at least until the armistice. 'If the Emperor abdicates, we believe we can guarantee a favourable development of the situation; but the Chancellor should remain.'

Simons thought that Prince Max should become Lieutenant-General of the Empire, with Ebert as Chancellor, until the election of a National Constituent Assembly. The Prince himself suggested to Spa that his successor should be Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, German Minister at Copenhagen, whom he summoned urgently to Berlin.

Late in the evening of 7 November he followed his letter of resignation by a despatch, which strictly defined the limits of the conclusions which the Monarch should draw from the resignation of his Chancellor. He pointed out the danger of a military dictatorship, which would involve civil war and 'the dissolution of the whole organism of the German nation in Bolshevism'. The majority of the troops would go over to the insurgents. He urgently dissuaded the Emperor from attempt-

## BEFORE ABDICATION

ing to form a government 'without the participation of the Social Democrats or in avowed hostility to them', since 'such a government could now only take the form of a military dictatorship'. This would be a greater danger for the Reich than the renunciation of the throne by the Sovereign and the Crown Prince under pressure from the Socialists.

In his letter of resignation he confined himself to stating that he could not remain in power after the Socialist ultimatum. In the despatch which followed his resignation, which did not arrive at Spa until the following morning, he pointed out that nothing could be done against the Socialists. This was in effect to advise abdication. According to Max of Baden this 'supplementary proposal' of his was 'intended to reserve to the Crown some remainder of dignity and initiative, while making it possible for the Social Democrats to remain in the Government'.

At midday on 8 November Prince Max received the reply from Spa. William II confined himself to writing: 'I reserve My decision on Your Highness's request for leave to resign, until the armistice has been concluded. . . . Further decisions will be determined by the resulting situation. In any case I request Your Highness to remain in office till then.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The same evening the Wolff Agency announced that the Chancellor had offered his resignation and that the Emperor had requested him to remain provisionally in office. —

The Emperor avoided alluding to the question of abdication. Grünau was more explicit: 'His Majesty has flatly refused to consider Your Grand Ducal Highness' proposals on the question of the Throne, and considers it as much as ever His duty to remain at His post.'

Even before obtaining these negative replies from Spa, the Chancellor had sent a further despatch, more pressing than that of the previous evening, in which he urgently demanded abdication. The same morning he was informed that the revolution had triumphed in Brunswick, Munich, Schwerin, Stuttgart and Cologne. There was no time to be lost. Mutinies were breaking out all over the country.

If the principle of monarchy was to be saved, said the Prince in his telegram, 'His Majesty should at once declare his firm intention to abdicate as soon as the armistice negotiations have reached a point which permits of the issue of writs for the election of a Constituent National Assembly. Such an Assembly would have to determine the new forms of constitution which should have ultimate validity for the whole German people, including those sections of it which up to now had no part in the Empire. Such a National Assembly would then regulate all the constitutional questions connected with the abdication. Till that time His Majesty would appoint a Deputy.

'The above solution appears to me to offer the following advantages:

## BEFORE ABDICATION

'(1) The Crown, far from capitulating to the Social Democrats, compels the Social Democrats to capitulate to it;

'(2) The question of the renunciation of His Imperial and Royal Highness, the Crown Prince, and the question of the regency, which such renunciation would involve, is thus postponed;

'(3) At the elections the monarchical cause will have the advantage over the Republican, because the initiative in holding the elections . . . will have been taken by the Crown;

'(4) The fighting temper of the masses will be diverted from the street to the polling-booth, from illegal into legal channels; and thus the peaceable sections of the population have an increasing chance of counteracting the movement. The prospects of the Monarchists would be favourable. . . .'

When he received this telegram for submission to the Emperor, Baron von Grünau,<sup>1</sup> Councillor of

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Grünau had represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Emperor since 4 October 1916, just as since March 1917 his colleague, von Lersner, had been Liaison Officer between the Ministry and G.H.Q. The Reichstag's Committee of Enquiry has revealed several interesting telegrams from Grünau to his Ministry. One was on 14 December 1917. The Ministry had requested Grünau to intervene in order to get the Emperor and G.H.Q. to show some moderation in their claims concerning the annexation of Briey. Grünau replied that he could do nothing: 'For the moment feeling is very optimistic here and there are schemes for crushing the enemy.' He recalls that on a former occasion, *e.g.* in the negotiations which took place on 23 April and 9 August 1917 at Kreuznach, G.H.Q. was



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Legation, a young and amiable diplomat, who was sorely troubled by this sudden responsibility, determined to take counsel with Admiral von Hintze.

\* \* \*

Formerly Naval attaché at Petersburg, and later minister in Mexico, China and Norway, Paul von Hintze had shown considerable aptitude for the more adventurous side of diplomacy,<sup>1</sup> before becoming in July 1918, at the age of sixty-four, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He had just 'joyfully' accepted the Embassy at Moscow in the place of Count Mirbach, who had been assassinated, when, 'at His Majesty's command',<sup>2</sup> he succeeded von Kühlmann at the Wilhelmstrasse. He took up his duties on 20 July, at the moment when the offensive in Champagne had failed and the fortune of war was turning against Germany.

This cultivated seaman, tinged with a certain aura of mystery and romance, had the reputation

disposed to make certain small concessions to France. A further despatch of Grünau on 1 October 1918 has often been quoted: 'My impression is that everyone here has completely lost his head.' *Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918. Vierte Reihe im Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses*, April 1925, 2 volumes.

<sup>1</sup> When he was appointed German Minister for China during the World War, he reached Peking in the disguise of a ship's stoker.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from the Chancellor, von Hertling, to the Vice-Chancellor, von Payer, 8 July 1918. Hintze would certainly have preferred the Moscow Embassy to the Ministry at Berlin.

of a charming personality, though his fondness for paradox often led his enemies to describe him as a cynical charlatan.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to what might have been expected from a career which had made him the chosen man of the Pan-Germanists, he based his foreign policy on the most attentive observation of realities, which speedily led to his giving the appearance of being inspired with the blackest pessimism. It was not long before Ludendorff conceived the greatest distrust for the character and intelligence of the Secretary of State.<sup>2</sup> But when on 28 September the old Chancellor von Hertling learned that G.H.Q. was demanding an armistice in the almost immediate future, he cried, 'With all his pessimism Hintze was right.'<sup>3</sup> So also von Payer, the Vice-Chancellor: 'You justified von Hintze's pessimism which was founded on a knowledge of facts.'

<sup>1</sup> K. F. Nowak: *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> This was according to the evidence of General von Mertz, given before the Committee of Enquiry. The General reported a conversation which he had had on 1 September with Ludendorff. Nevertheless, telegrams sent by Baron von Lersner to Hintze on 4 and 5 October would seem to show that Ludendorff had still full confidence in von Hintze. Ludendorff wished the Admiral to remain in the Cabinet as Minister of Foreign Affairs. When Hintze's resignation was decided upon he expressed a wish that Hintze should be placed in charge of the armistice negotiations. Hintze maintains that Erzberger prevented the Cabinet from making this appointment. He had been told so in confidence by Haussmann.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Karl Graf von Hertling (the Chancellor's son). *Ein Jahr in der Reichskanzlei*, Freiburg, 1919.

Erzberger too admitted that 'Hintze has a clear view of the general situation'.

Nevertheless, when on 4 October Max of Baden reconstructed his Cabinet, Admiral von Hintze refused absolutely to retain his portfolio.<sup>1</sup> 'I should have been utterly out of place in the new Government,' he said.<sup>2</sup> He was well aware that he had not the confidence of a number of Members of Parliament, despite the fact that he had energetically intervened in favour of the extension of parliamentary rights. Von Payer regretted his departure. Von Payer was an old Democrat who laughed at the 'aura of impenetrable mystery' with which the Foreign Office was wont to surround itself, 'an atmosphere', as he said, 'where an elected priesthood performed solemn rites in secrecy', and he was more at his ease with Hintze than with Hintze's predecessor Kühlmann, whose impenetrable reserve and *blasé* detachment seemed to him to savour too much of the old diplomacy. He asserted that Hintze was inferior to no one of his predecessors or successors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as regards either his initiative or the objectivity of his outlook.

Accused later of lack of energy and of complete 'political sterility' by Ludendorff (whom he was to

<sup>1</sup> He resigned on 29 September and the Emperor refused to accept his resignation. He refused it a second time on 30 September and accepted it only at von Hintze's third request, on 3 October.

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of von Hintze before the Committee of Enquiry.

challenge in vain to a duel), and by Colonel Bauer, the peppery assistant of the Chief Quartermaster-General,<sup>1</sup> Hintze's position in August and September 1918 could hardly have been a bed of roses. 'There were no political measures calculated to maintain a situation which from the military point of view was utterly ruined.'<sup>2</sup> The Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag before which Hintze appeared arrived at the conclusion that he had done his duty to the utmost.

At Spa, after his resignation of the portfolio of foreign affairs, Hintze represented the Foreign Office at G.H.Q. When Grünau approached him on the subject of Prince Max's latest telegram he pointed out to Grünau certain obscurities in the Chancellor's despatch of 8 November. About three o'clock in the afternoon he called Prince Max on the telephone, who, 'after reflection', begged him to take part in the mission with which Grünau was entrusted. Von Hintze stated that he would confine himself to transmitting the telegram to the Emperor without supporting the views contained therein. At the same time he advised the Prince to send some members of the Government to Spa.

He also asked for information as to certain details. When, for example, should the Emperor

<sup>1</sup> Max Bauer, *Der grosse Krieg in Feld und Heimat, Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen*, Tübingen, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence of Colonel Schwerdtfeger before the Reichstag Committee of Enquiry, Vol. II, p. 277.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

abdicate? 'After considerable hesitation' the Chancellor and his Under-Secretary of State, Wahnschaffe, replied, 'Immediately'. Who then, said Grünau, would be Lieutenant-General of the Reich? No definite answer was given to this question.

Hintze and Grünau thought that, after reading the telegram, the Emperor would at once ask whether the army could and would remain faithful to him, and under his direction destroy the revolutionary movement in Germany. In accordance with his agreement with the Chancellor, Hintze, accompanied by Grünau (who was overjoyed to have obtained such assistance), repaired to Hindenburg and to General Gröner, explained the mission with which he had been entrusted, and begged them to accompany him to the Sovereign. 'The Marshal at once refused. He had, he said, given his final opinion to His Majesty and he would have nothing to do with the matter.' Gröner, who had already been acquainted with the trend of events by Wahnschaffe, was extremely reserved. But he was equally unwilling to interview the Emperor. Both Hindenburg and Gröner persisted in their resolve, even after it had been pointed out to them that the Kaiser's decision would depend upon the opinion he was able to form of the moral of his troops.

And so it came about that Hintze and Grünau alone went to see the Kaiser. 'I told His Majesty

that the Chancellor had entrusted me with a mission that in my view devolved rather on the responsible members of the Government, of which I was not a member; that I was carrying out this mission although I did not on that account approve of it in any way. His Majesty listened quietly while I read the Chancellor's telegram and the explanations given over the telephone, then said, "You must tell the Chancellor that the Emperor has no thought of abdication." Then turning to me he said, "You at any rate do not expect any other reply from me." I answered, "Certainly not, Sire."

The Emperor at this period played a game of bluff as if he had the whole game in his hands. He sent a letter to Potsdam in which there was no hint of abdication. The general impression in his entourage was that he was absolutely resolved to keep the crown.<sup>1</sup>

After the interview Hintze went to see Gröner once again, undoubtedly to inform him of what had happened. He expressed his regret to Gröner that he had not had him with him during

<sup>1</sup> As a result of this letter, which was received by aeroplane, Prince August Wilhelm, who was at Potsdam, was extremely surprised to learn from his brother Adalbert about one o'clock on 9 November (Adalbert having been in telephonic communication from Colberg with Max of Baden about 11.30) that the Chancellor was announcing the Emperor's abdication. Similarly Count Eulenburg, who was in touch with the Imperial entourage, found it difficult to believe that the Emperor was abdicating. (*Diary of Prince August Wilhelm.*)

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

the interview. 'Gröner replied that on several occasions he had told Marshal Hindenburg that the army would refuse to take part in a civil war, but it was difficult for him to disavow the Marshal.'

Hintze forwarded the Kaiser's decision to the Chancellor by telephone. The Chancellor was greatly moved at the news. Hintze then advised him to speak personally on the telephone with the Kaiser, and the Prince did so at 8 p.m. According to Hintze the telephonic conversation between the two lasted three-quarters of an hour,<sup>1</sup> and was, so he was told, 'serious but without violence or invective of any kind'. On the other hand, Prince Max noted the 'fury of indignation' with which the Emperor had rejected his proposals. 'He himself was only too anxious to throw all his energy and will-power into the task of convincing his Sovereign; and knowing that the general tone of the interview might be difficult he had taken the precaution of asking his Adjutant, von Prittwitz,<sup>2</sup> to listen and take down in writing what he had to say.

He appealed to his cousin's better nature. 'Your abdication', he said, 'has become necessary . . . to fulfil your mission as the Peacemaking Emperor till the end. . . . The abdication might produce a decisive turn in the course of the peace negotiations and take the wind out of the Entente

<sup>1</sup> According to Prince Max the conversation lasted only twenty minutes

<sup>2</sup> Since 1927, German Ambassador to the United States.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

Jingoes' sails. . . . It would be hailed as a liberating and a healing act. . . . If civil war and worse can be prevented through your abdication, your name will be blessed by future generations. . . .'

He also appealed to arguments of a more realistic nature:

'The troops are not to be depended on. At Cologne power is in the hands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. At Brunswick the Red Flag flies from the Palace. At Munich the Republic has been proclaimed. At Schwerin a Workers' and Soldiers' Council is sitting. . . . We are steering straight for civil war. . . . The position is to-day untenable. . . . Unless the abdication takes place to-day I can do no more; nor can the German Princes shield the Kaiser any more. . . . This is the last possible moment.'

Prince Max also endeavoured to allay the suspicions of the Kaiser:

'Such is the terrible situation in which I am bound to speak out and not gloss over things. I have heard that some persons have been denouncing me for alleged intrigues against you. That is a lie, as any one of my colleagues and associates can prove to you. But for my efforts to shield you the question would already have become acute a week ago. I speak to you to-day both as your relative and as a German Prince. . . .'

Prince Max took the view that abdication should be followed either by the renunciation of the throne by the Crown Prince, with a regency for



his eldest son, or preferably by the appointment of a Lieutenant-General and by the convocation of a National Assembly.

But the Emperor announced his 'unshakable intention not to give way'. He was confident of his ability to restore order in Germany at the head of the army. The necessary instructions, he said, had already been given. 'I begged him to dismiss me and appoint a new Chancellor immediately, now that I no longer possessed his confidence. The Kaiser refused, with the words: "You sent out the armistice offer, you will have to put your name to the conditions."' The Prince expressed his readiness to remain in office until the armistice was signed.

After this lively conversation with his Sovereign the Chancellor sent yet a further despatch to the Emperor urging the necessity of abdication. The King of Bavaria and the Duke of Brunswick had abdicated. The Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin had accepted the demands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. 'The overwhelming majority of the Cabinet, which up to yesterday showed a majority against Your Majesty's renunciation, to-day regards this step as the only possible means of saving Germany from a bloody civil war. Herr von Payer has declared to me that he will be unable in case of my resignation to remain any longer in the post of Vice-Chancellor. . . . He will be followed by all the members of the War Cabinet. The for-

mation of a new government is impossible since in the view of the Centre leaders also it would be impossible to find any working majority in the Reichstag. The Empire will thus find itself without a Chancellor, without a Government, without any compact Parliamentary Majority, utterly incapable of negotiating.'

Late in the evening Wahnschaffe asked Grünau to communicate this telegram to the Kaiser. Grünau refused. The Emperor, he said, was in bed, and it was quite useless to disturb him; the telegram would not cause him to change his decision. Wahnschaffe urged Grünau to endeavour to convince the Emperor of the necessity of a regency. Grünau replied that the Chancellor should either come himself or send Ministers for the purpose.

Prince Max had already summoned Solf and the Conservative, von Waldow, Ministers respectively of Foreign Affairs and of Food, and had urged them to proceed to Spa. Solf agreed, and a special train was ordered. Von Waldow refused. He was not, he said, competent in the matter, and he was opposed to abdication so long as the army remained loyal to the Emperor. 'The Emperor and his military advisers are the only persons who are competent to judge of the loyalty of the army.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Von Waldow made a point of making this addition to Wahnschaffe's story, in a letter published in the *Kreuzzeitung* of 19 August 1919.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Before trying to find another Minister to make the journey, Wahnschaffe telephoned to Scheidemann and Ebert. Scheidemann agreed. Ebert made no secret of his view that the Ministers would arrive too late at Spa. 'The Emperor's decision', he said, 'will be entirely ineffective unless it is known at latest at nine o'clock to-morrow morning.' Ebert told a high official in confidence that the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party had issued orders to the workers that on the following morning they should remain at work if the morning papers announced abdication; otherwise they were to leave the factories after the break for breakfast, and meet at certain prearranged localities.<sup>1</sup> The same night these statements were transmitted to Spa by telephone.

Solf's journey to Spa was abandoned, and Solf confined himself to sending an urgent telegram to the Emperor: 'The participation of the Majority Socialists in the Government is an indispensable condition of any continuation of the Peace Action. The Socialists leave the Government at once if their Ultimatum is disregarded. Then there only remains the possibility of a Military Dictatorship. In any case, in the eyes of the Entente the Government will have become incapable of conducting negotiations. In these circumstances the Entente will continue hostilities . . . Civil war can only be averted by an

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden.*

#### BEFORE ABDICATION

immediate decision of Your Majesty's. I therefore most reverently beg Your Majesty by this supreme sacrifice to secure for the Empire the peace which alone can save it from ruin.'

Max of Baden states that during that night a proposal was made to him which he rejected because, in his view, it would have been equivalent to a *coup d'état*. The proposal was that he should at once send out a message to the Press stating that he was convinced of the necessity for abdication, that he had demanded it, and would carry it through. The people should therefore be patient until the armistice was settled. A message of this kind would have restrained popular violence while at the same time forcing the hand of the Emperor. Prince Max has never revealed the origin of this suggestion. He replied to it that he would do nothing against the Emperor. He frequently wondered whether in so doing he had done wrong, but his conscience forbade him to agree to a *coup d'état*.

### III

*The Decisions of G.H.Q.—Conversations of Hindenburg and Gröner with General von Plessen.*

THE alarm had now reached Spa. In the evening of 8 November, Major Niemann was summoned to the Operations Bureau of G.H.Q. He was informed that the insurrection had reached Cologne, Coblenz and Mainz; the rebels were in occupation of the Rhine bridge-heads. The army was provisioned for a few days only and the supply depôts were all on the right bank of the Rhine. Was the Emperor aware of the position? 'If he did not know it,' says Niemann, 'it was my duty to point out to him the gravity of the impending danger. I replied that such serious news should be communicated to the Emperor by the responsible officials.'<sup>1</sup>

Niemann went at once to see General von Marschall, a large man of jolly appearance, who had for three months been chief of the Military Cabinet. Marschall had always advised Niemann to tell the Kaiser the truth, and not to exhibit everything to him through rose-coloured spectacles. This time, however, the gravity of the news was too much for him. 'According to certain accounts, Gröner is in a state of uncertainty after his visit to Berlin. The men to whom

<sup>1</sup> Niemann does not state who was his interlocutor at G.H.Q.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

the Emperor has entrusted the command of the army should guarantee personally the accuracy of such serious news. Anyone who thinks it his duty to advise His Majesty to abdicate should take full responsibility for his advice before the world and before history.'

It was impossible that the responsibility in question could remain long unassumed. During a conference with the representatives of G.H.Q., held in the morning of 8 November, the Emperor had disclosed his intention of restoring order in Germany at the head of his troops, and General Gröner had been requested to draw up a plan of operations.<sup>1</sup> The same evening, Hindenburg and Gröner had an interview on the subject with General von Plessen.

The conversation of this evening was a fearful ordeal for von Plessen, who for forty years had thought it his sacred duty to shield the Monarch from any unpleasantness, however slight. In 1918 he was seventy-seven years old, six years older than Hindenburg. Since 1879, when he became aide-de-camp to the old Emperor William I, he had scarcely ever quitted the Court. In 1892 he was put in charge of Imperial Headquarters. A General of the Court and a polished

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919. This is what William II told the Chancellor in the telephonic conversation the same evening: 'The necessary instructions have already been issued' for the Emperor to restore order in Germany at the head of the army.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

man of the world, he had never been distinguished for political acumen.

Prince Philipp Eulenburg, on most occasions a far-seeing counsellor of the Emperor, feared the influence on his master of an officer who talked of nothing but 'shooting them down', even when the question was how best to smother a Press campaign.<sup>1</sup> In October 1899 von Plessen was clamouring for war with England. To an admiral who adduced the naval superiority of the British he replied: 'Get a single division landed, —and we're rid of England! If that won't do, we and Russia can march on Egypt and India!'<sup>2</sup>

Since 1914 the General had shown the most self-sacrificing solicitude in keeping the Kaiser in a good humour and full of optimism. 'His Majesty must have nothing but good news.'<sup>3</sup> When Niemann arrived from G.H.Q., to inform the Emperor of the military situation, von Plessen begged him to deal gently with the Sovereign, whose responsibilities were so heavy and who was

<sup>1</sup> Johannes Haller: *Philip Eulenburg, The Kaiser's Friend*. English trans. by Ethel Colburn Mayne. 2 vols. London, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Freiherr von Eckhardstein: *Lebensinnerungen und politische Denkwürdigkeiten*, Leipzig, 1920, trans. Professor George Young: *Ten Years at the Court of St. James's*, 1895-1905, London, 1921. Cf. also Emil Ludwig, *Wilhelm der Zweite*, trans. Ethel Colburn Mayne, London, New York, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> This was said by an officer of von Plessen's department to Erzberger, before an interview with the Kaiser. M. Erzberger: *Erhebniße im Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1920.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

terribly sensible of the gravity of recent events; at all costs, he said, the Kaiser's moral balance must be preserved. All means were good means, provided they hid the truth from him. But events were stronger than the devices of the aged courtier, devices which in other circumstances might have seemed worthy of sympathy. Since 14 August the German retreat on the western front had been a source of grave disquietude to the Emperor. His depression and despair were generally noted. 'In a man of His Majesty's mercurial temperament and keen imaginative powers, it often happens that success inspires him with the most grandiose conceptions and, inversely, that failure weighs upon him more heavily than would be justified by an impartial examination of the military situation.'<sup>1</sup> The defeats of 2 September in the neighbourhoods of Arras and Cambrai completely upset him and forced him to take to his bed, in that very Castle of Wilhelms-höhe which had been paced by Napoleon III in his captivity after Sedan in 1870. His immediate entourage were afraid of a complete moral and physical collapse, as a result of his general condition of excitement and exhaustion.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Statement of General Wetzell before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag. Until September 1918 Wetzell was in charge of the Operations Bureau of G.H.Q.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann, in the *Tag*, 11 May 1922. Niemann published in the *Tag* certain souvenirs, which he subsequently issued in his book, *Kaiser und Revolution*. In editing this volume he



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Empress, though herself seriously ill, succeeded in bringing some comfort to her stricken husband. On 18 September he recovered his optimism; Plessen had visited certain army headquarters and, as he had done for more than a quarter of a century, brought him the most encouraging news.<sup>1</sup>

But in the evening of 8 November von Plessen was faced by army commanders who had taken a sudden decision; they held that the operation 'on the home front' of which the Emperor had dreamed could not be carried out, and they told him so.

G.H.Q. had been informed that in the great cities of Germany, on the coast, in the West and in the South, Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had seized power. The revolutionaries were in occupation of the line of the Rhine and of the most important railway centres. The great supply depôts, which, in anticipation of the armistice, had been constituted along and behind the Rhine, were in their hands.<sup>2</sup> Supplies for the army would not hold out for more than two or three days, being dependent upon the depôts at Dusseldorf, Cologne, Coblenz and Mainz, as also on those of Leipzig, Halle, Magdeburg and Hamburg. If civil war were to break out, the depôts

attenuated to a considerable extent certain articles which he had already published. Colonel Schwerdtfeger drew attention to this detail before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag.

<sup>1</sup> Schwerdtfeger's report.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

would be pillaged and a state of famine would result.

The troops in the interior of the country had almost all gone over to the revolution. Even those who were regarded as absolutely sound had succumbed to the contagion. Even the army at the front showed some signs of the dry-rot of disintegration. Thousands of stragglers and innumerable deserters were storming trains at Liège and Namur. One division, which was considered a *corps d'élite*, whose duty was to cover the rear of G.H.Q. against the insurgents from Cologne and Aix-la-Chapelle, refused to obey its officers and, despite their orders, set out for home. It became necessary to dismiss the Landsturm troops occupying the district of Aix-la-Chapelle, otherwise they would have dismissed themselves. The army was no longer to be relied on. The troops would not fire upon their comrades in uniform or on their fellow-countrymen. It was impossible to march on Berlin at the head of the troops or to make them right-about-face for the purpose of restoring order in Germany.

It would have been extremely difficult to find, concentrate and employ trustworthy regiments when, from the North Sea to Switzerland, the armies were in contact with the enemy. On the other hand, in Germany the troops might easily find that they were engaged in serious fighting. It was to be expected that serious battles would take place on the line of the Rhine, and there were

600 kilometres between the Western front and Berlin. Among the insurgents were well-trained and well-armed troops occupying fortresses. To attack such troops formations would be needed stronger than any which, in the most favourable circumstances, could be hurriedly grouped together. More munitions and equipment would be needed. The civil war would have to be waged in addition to the war against the Allies, who would undoubtedly continue the pursuit. It was unthinkable that the army should be dragged into a bloody struggle against the revolutionaries with an implacable enemy at its heels. The army was no longer in a condition to support such a burden.<sup>1</sup>

Von Plessen, who was thunderstruck by these statements from G.H.Q., seemed to be not properly clear as to the situation. He underestimated the strength of the opposing forces and counted on a spirit in the army which was no longer existent there. His case was that in no circumstances could the Emperor and the army submit to 'a handful of revolutionaries, a band of infamous sailors'. All the officers, he said, would be severe in their condemnation of such weakness.<sup>2</sup>

Hindenburg and Gröner maintained their views

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> According to von Plessen, Marshal Hindenburg was disposed to admit the justice of his arguments, but Gröner maintained his view. On the other hand, the Memorandum of 27 July 1919, on which Hindenburg collaborated with von Plessen, makes Hindenburg agree with Gröner.

## BEFORE ABDICATION

'while fully appreciating von Plessen's sentiments'. 'With a heavy heart' the Marshal associated himself with the judgment which General Gröner had 'based on a minute examination of the situation. In existing circumstances no success could be expected and a responsible adviser had to consider that complete collapse was certain.'

\* \* \*

Max of Baden did not know until much later of the interview between Hindenburg, Gröner and von Plessen. He thought it of capital importance. The meeting had taken place about an hour after the Prince's telephonic conversation with the Emperor. At that time William II was convinced that the troops were sound, even to the extent of fighting for him against the revolutionaries, and Prince Max thought that the Emperor's optimism was shared by G.H.Q.

During the night of 8-9 November Colonel von Haefften, who represented G.H.Q. at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had a fruitless conversation with Gröner from Berlin. During the same night the Vice-Chancellor von Payer had once again tried to gain the support of the Chief Quartermaster-General, but had failed. 'I got the impression', he said, 'that Gröner had now been forced to recognise the necessity of abdication, but was not in a position to predict the Emperor's decision.' As a matter of fact, the Marshal and his chief subordinate had communicated their

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

views to von Plessen, and their views were contrary to those of the Monarch. But they did not communicate them to William II until the following morning. 'It will always remain a mystery to me', writes Prince Max, 'what induced the Supreme Command to let the night pass without giving the alarm. The Kaiser ought at once to have been told—without regard for his sleep—that his refusal to abdicate was based on false premises. The men in Spa were well aware of the desperate situation of the Government. For the last twelve hours, almost without intermission, they had been getting alarm signals from us with the burden: "We can hold up the Revolution to-day—but not to-morrow."'

The Emperor's most devoted adherents, such as Niemann, were violent in their reproaches of the Chief Quartermaster-General for not having warned the Sovereign earlier, by informing him that G.H.Q. was abandoning the principles which it had violently proclaimed on 1 November to Drews, and solemnly on 6 November in the Manifesto to the troops on the western front. 'Sincerity in this matter would have been a manly act.'

As a matter of fact, after his return from Berlin, General Gröner had painted the situation in the darkest possible colours. 'He spoke of the extremely bad impression he had received in Berlin. The revolution was upon us. . . . The people wished for peace at any price. The

## BEFORE ABDICATION

Government's authority was non-existent. The campaign against the Emperor was in full swing and abdication was wellnigh inevitable. The troops in the interior could not be relied upon. . . . The men returned from leave had already contaminated the army. They would refuse to fight against the insurgents. . . . The army was no longer to be relied upon and the country was face to face with revolution.'

The above report, which is recorded by William II himself in his *Memoirs*, would appear to show that the Kaiser had been given clear information by his Chief Quartermaster-General. It was the Emperor's business to understand that abdication was necessary; and in General Gröner's view it was the business of other people to make him understand it more clearly still.

The Emperor's immediate entourage did not undertake the task. Von Payer wondered what were the real opinions of 'those fellows'. 'Have they really been able to persuade themselves, in spite of everything, that, after four years of war, after such terrible sacrifices, after so gigantic a defeat, after all that has happened in Russia, the Kaiser, with all his responsibility for the situation, can continue to reign as if nothing had occurred to change things? Or do they think that if his refusal to abdicate involves revolution, the officers, the nobility and the monarchists could or would risk their lives to maintain him on the throne? Or is it simply that they have no ideas,

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

no power of taking a decision, and are simply letting things take their course to their inevitable end?’

As a matter of fact, the Kaiser did not decide to abdicate until he had been unmistakably informed that the soldiers would not follow him. There can be no doubt that this critical moment was delayed by the scruples of Marshal Hindenburg, whose loyalty to the Emperor kept him silent and prevented him from intervening personally in the matter.

CHAPTER II

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT SPA

.





## I

*The Conference in the Forenoon—Groner versus Schulenburg—  
The Crown Prince—Colonel Heye's Communication—Abdi-  
cation of the Imperial Throne, but not of the Crown of Prussia.*

THE Emperor was lodged at the Château de la Fraineuse,<sup>1</sup> which in July 1920 was to be the headquarters of the Spa Reparations Conference. During the first days after his arrival he remained in the Imperial train, pending preparations for his reception at the delightful château, 'where panic was to link hands with treason'.<sup>2</sup> Major Niemann was enthusiastic in his description of the harmonious simplicity of the place, the white well-proportioned façade ornamented with elegant colonnades, rising in a single storey above a magnificent park. From the marble entrance hall, which was reached through a peristyle, the visitor passed into a large salon, whose bow-windows afforded 'a melancholy outlook on to flower-beds faded and discoloured with the tints of autumn'.<sup>3</sup> To the left was the dining-room, to the right a small sitting-room with an adjacent room which was the office of the aide-

<sup>1</sup> The property of M. Auguste Peltzer, a prominent Belgian manufacturer.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann: *Wanderungen mit Kaiser Wilhelm II*, Leipzig, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1924.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

de-camp on duty. From the entrance hall on the ground floor a large staircase led to the first floor where were the Emperor's apartments.

Early in the morning of 9 November, William II read the telegrams from Berlin which were forwarded to him by Gröner.<sup>1</sup> He put a marginal note (probably the last of his reign) on Prince Max's message, a note which shows that he paid no great attention to his Chancellor. Against the last sentence of the telegram, 'The Empire will thus find itself without a Chancellor, without a Government, without any compact Parliamentary Majority, utterly incapable of negotiating,' the Kaiser wrote: 'This is what has happened already.'<sup>2</sup> He was full of contempt for 'the miserable embarrassment of a Government which has no initiative, strength or will to survive, and which simply lets events take their course'.<sup>3</sup>

The Emperor was not alone in being disturbed by the telegrams from Berlin. Grünau had gone

<sup>1</sup> In his *Memoirs* William II summarises as follows the telegrams, of the contents of which he was informed on 9 November: 'The Chancellor informed me, as he had already informed me on 7 November, that the Social Democrats, even the Social Democratic Secretaries of State, were demanding my abdication. This view was now shared by the other members of the Government who had hitherto been opposed to it, and also in the Reichstag by the Parties composing the parliamentary majority. The Chancellor begged me to abdicate at once, otherwise it was to be expected there would be serious street fighting in Berlin, and bloodshed. Such fighting had already begun on a small scale.'

<sup>2</sup> Hintze's *Notes*.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs* of William II.

to see Hintze, and the two diplomats, who were seriously alarmed by the repeated telephone calls of the Chancellor during the night, went to see Hindenburg and Gröner, who read the telegrams. The soldiers repeated to the diplomats what they had said to von Plessen the previous evening. There could be no question of undertaking a campaign against 'the home front'. There was no doubt that the army could do nothing against the revolution and they would tell the Emperor so.<sup>1</sup>

A little later Niemann came to see Gröner. 'In terms reserved and almost taciturn' the Chief Quartermaster-General pointed out the danger to the army and to the supplies of the army as a result of the progress of the revolutionary movement. Niemann asked whether the Kaiser knew to what extent the evil had spread. Gröner replied that in a few hours there would be no doubt on the matter. Various officers from the front had come to Spa to give an account of the moral of the army, and the result of the enquiry would be communicated to the Kaiser. Niemann

<sup>1</sup> The decision, observes Niemann, was therefore taken before the views of the officers from the front (see Chapter IV, pp. 214-230) had been heard. According to Nowak (*Chaos*, Munich, 1922), Gröner told the diplomats that even before hearing the evidence of these officers he could assure them that the army would not follow the Emperor. Like Niemann, Schulenburg reproaches Gröner for not having waited for the opinions for which he had asked the officers from the front. It is probable that the swift march of events and the repeated telephone calls from Berlin hastened Gröner's decision.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

was then recalled by telephone to the Château de la Fraineuse.

Niemann had been no more than three months in the personal service of the Emperor, after serving on various staffs, service which had taken him to all the fronts, to G.H.Q. and even to the Embassy at Constantinople as military attaché. As a member of the staff of the army group commanded by Duke Albrecht of Wurtemberg he had in July 1918, after the failure of the offensive in Champagne, drawn up a report on the general situation which had attracted the attention of Ludendorff.<sup>1</sup> Several days later he was appointed the representative of G.H.Q. attached to the Emperor.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At Avesnes on 1 August 1918, Ludendorff had reproached Niemann for having, in his report, contemplated concessions to the enemy. Such concessions would be dangerous, especially as regards England (Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*). Despite his failures in July, Ludendorff was therefore still full of optimism. Thus, on the same day, von Radowitz wrote from G.H.Q. to the Vice-Chancellor von Payer that Ludendorff hoped to be soon 'in a position to undertake further offensives'. Before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag, Professor Delbruck reproached Ludendorff with having shown his duplicity in allowing himself to be represented by men of comparatively moderate views, such as Major Niemann, with the Emperor after August 1918, and Colonel von Haefften, at the Foreign Office after July 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann's chief business was to keep the Emperor informed of the military situation. In his report before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag, Colonel Schwerdtfeger proved that G.H.Q. had given Niemann the fullest documentary and other information.

When Niemann arrived at La Fraineuse, he found the Kaiser preparing to set out for a morning walk, 'his face grave but with no trace of nervous agitation'. William II left the château and told the guard that he would remain in the neighbourhood in order that he might be informed if the Marshal asked for him.

The morning of 9 November was cold and foggy. A thick mist lay all around La Fraineuse. 'Rain-drops were falling gently from the trees together with the last leaves of autumn which the rain had brought down.' Niemann thought that this atmosphere had a reviving effect on the Emperor, but the Crown Prince, who arrived at Spa about midday in a motor-car from the province of Namur, arrived 'perished with cold and with his limbs completely benumbed'.

The Emperor spoke of the outbreak of Bolshevism which had already spread over Austria-Hungary and was about to extend to Germany. From the final telegram of Max of Baden, announcing the deposition of German Kings and Grand Dukes, Niemann had drawn the conclusion that the revolution was directed not against the person of the Emperor, but against the social order as a whole. It is possible that William II reasoned on similar lines. In any case, his conversation with Niemann was on the subject of Bolshevism. 'In face of a peril which threatens the whole of Europe it would be absurd to continue the war. Such mania must be confronted

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

by solid ramparts. It is to be hoped that the enemy will ultimately see the danger to the whole of European civilisation if Germany is delivered over to Bolshevism.'

Niemann agreed entirely with the views of the Emperor, whose imagination was already launching him at the head of a crusade against the red peril; but he was still troubled by the information given him by the Chief Quartermaster-General, and he ventured to allude to it. In order to subdue Bolshevism the army must in the first instance subdue the revolutionary movement in Germany and extinguish by force the revolutionary fires lighted by the sailors. Unfortunately, the army would appear to be dangerously threatened by the insurrection in the Rhenish cities.

Still carried away by his dream of an opportune truce, the Emperor contented himself by replying, 'We will overcome all these difficulties by swift military action.' This was the language which he had held the evening before in his conversation with the Chancellor. He believed what it was to his interest to believe, but it was not long before his hopes were to be rudely shaken. A soldier on duty ran up to announce that the Marshal had arrived, and the Emperor returned to La Fraineuse.

\* \* \*

Plessen and Marschall were already at La Fraineuse together with General Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg, ex-Chief of Staff of the *Corps de Garde*, who had been for the last two

years Chief of Staff of the Crown Prince's army group. Whenever Schulenburg's name occurs in the reports or memoirs of persons who had dealings with him during the war, it is mentioned with praise. He was only about fifty years of age. Ludendorff extols the clear intellect and extraordinary energy of this 'reliable colleague' in whom he had full confidence.<sup>1</sup>

So too Baron von Eckhardstein, who knew him between 1902 and 1906, when military attaché in London, attributes to him the easy tact of a diplomatist who was both a courtier and a man of the world, and the long-sighted adaptability of a politician.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the Crown Prince, with whom he was on the best of terms, alludes to the breadth of his culture, the tirelessness of his enthusiasm, and the absolute purity of his character, and sums him up as a true gentleman of the old Prussian school.<sup>3</sup>

On 9 November old Prussia was to find a champion in Schulenburg. He had just reached Spain in somewhat mysterious circumstances, having been summoned there by telephone during the night. 'The reasons for the invitation were never given; neither was the name of the person from

<sup>1</sup> Ludendorff: *Meine Kriegserinnerungen*, 1914-1918, Berlin, 1919. English Edition: *My War Memories*, 1914-1918, London, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> After the war Schulenburg became a member of the National Party in the Reichstag.

<sup>3</sup> *Meine Erinnerungen an Deutschlands Heldenkampf*, Berlin, 1923.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

whom the order emanated.'<sup>1</sup> Accompanied by three officers,<sup>2</sup> Schulenburg set out at once. He arrived about 8.30 a.m. at the Hotel Britannique, the seat of G.H.Q., and proceeded immediately to the Operations Bureau on the first floor. On the staircase he ran into Colonel Heye, 'who appeared most astonished and even somewhat taken aback to see him'.<sup>3</sup> After a short interview with Heye he turned to his companions and said: 'Nobody here is overpleased to see us. We seem to have stumbled right into something which is no business of ours.'

Like Colonel Heye, Gröner, and even the Marshal, seemed surprised and somewhat disturbed to find that the Crown Prince's Chief of Staff was with the Emperor. 'There was a definite object in his presence.'<sup>4</sup> It is tempting

<sup>1</sup> According to the anonymous memorandum reproduced by the Crown Prince in his *Erinnerungen*, it was Major von Stülpnagel, who would appear to have put through the call at Spa. The message was received at the Crown Prince's headquarters by Major von Bock. According to General von Eisenbart-Rothe (*Der Kaiser am 9 November*, Berlin, 1922), Schulenburg was involved in the events at Spa on 9 November merely as the result of a chance visit to G.H.Q.

<sup>2</sup> One of whom was the author of the memorandum quoted by the Crown Prince, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

<sup>4</sup> Nowak: Schulenburg's presence was so astonishing that Hintze wrote in his notes: 'His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince arrived in company with General Count Schulenburg.' Similarly, William II writes in his *Memoirs*: 'The Crown Prince

to believe that Schulenburg had been summoned by some person in the immediate entourage of the Emperor, who counted upon the fervour of his loyalty and the ardour of his monarchist sentiments to sustain or rekindle the enthusiasm of the Sovereign. As early as August 1916, when the question of substituting Hindenburg for Falkenhayn at G.H.Q. was under discussion, von Plessen had sought Schulenburg's advice.<sup>1</sup>

In the dining-room of the Hotel Britannique Schulenburg met Plessen and Marschall, who wore a troubled air. They told Schulenburg that Hindenburg and Gröner were about to explain to the Emperor the necessity of abdication. 'You have all gone mad here,' cried the general. 'The army is with the Emperor.' He denounced the spirit of despair, 'almost of lunacy', prevalent at Spa.<sup>2</sup> Plessen and Marschall then conducted Schulenburg to the conference which had been con-

came with his Chief of Staff, Count Schulenburg.' It will be seen that, to explain Schulenburg's presence, it was necessary to suppose that he had accompanied his immediate chief, the Crown Prince. In reality, he came independently of the Crown Prince. There can be no doubt on this point. The question who summoned him must remain a mystery. In his Memoranda of 7 December 1918 and 26 August 1919 Schulenburg assigns no motive for his journey.

<sup>1</sup> Max Bauer: *Der grosse Krieg in Feld und Heimat . . .*, Tübingen, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> So too one of the officers accompanying Schulenburg stated that the members of G.H.Q. with whom he was able to have speech, seemed to him 'perplexed, not to say distracted'.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

war might break out any moment. The army was provisioned for a few days only, and a disaster through sheer starvation was to be expected if the insurgents cut off supplies—which they would certainly do.<sup>1</sup> It was impossible to place any further reliance in the army. In these circumstances, it was utterly impossible to right-about-face in good order, in face of an enemy who would afterwards be on the heels of the army, in order to make a march of several weeks' duration on Berlin, with the accompaniment of civil war. This was the view not only of the Marshal and of the Chief Quartermaster-General, but of all the heads of departments at G.H.Q., of the Director-General of Supplies and of the Chief of the Field Railway Service.<sup>2</sup> The army was no longer in a condition to fight and was anxious above all for some rest. An armistice must be accepted on no matter what terms, and it must be concluded as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> G.H.Q. was not in a position to withdraw from the front the divisions which were capable of fight-

<sup>1</sup> According to his *Memoirs* this was the chief impression which the Kaiser received from Gröner's statement. "The army had provisions for no more than six days or a week, and the insurgents, who were in occupation of all the supply depôts and the bridge-heads of the Rhine, were in a position to cut off its supplies."

<sup>2</sup> Gröner's statement up to here was reproduced in this form by Schulenburg in his Memorandum of 7 December 1918. What follows comes from other sources.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs* of William II.

ing. A general *débâcle* might well follow. There were no more reserves.<sup>1</sup>

'Despite a certain considered reticence, the general effect of Gröner's statement was to make it necessary for the Emperor to abdicate without uttering a word in self-defence.'<sup>2</sup> The Crown Prince, who was much annoyed by the statement, violently attacks Gröner in his *Memoirs*, and represents this future Minister of the Republic as the evil genius of Spa, wellnigh as a traitor. Ludendorff's successor was 'inaccessible to those considerations of decency which a few moments before had prevented the old Marshal from speaking. . . . Roughly and brusquely he swept away the most ancient and honourable traditions and thought of nothing but of going straight to his goal and delivering the blow which it was his mission to deliver.'

It is probable that Gröner, as a Wurtemberger, had not fallen under the old Prussian tradition which makes of the monarch wellnigh a divine being. But the Crown Prince himself admits that the Chief Quartermaster-General's opinion was that not only of Hindenburg, who approved it in silence, but of almost all the heads of army groups and of the majority of the representatives of G.H.Q. Why then reproach Gröner for having said what all these responsible chiefs thought?

Gröner's 'terrifying' communication had a pro-

<sup>1</sup> Nowak: *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

found effect upon the Emperor, who stood speechless with perplexity, prostrated by consternation and absorbed in his own reflections, in the midst of a gloomy silence. A movement by Schulenburg made to catch the Emperor's eye aroused William from his stupor, and he asked the Count to give his views.

Schulenburg did not share Gröner's unqualified pessimism. He thought that the statements of the Chief Quartermaster-General did not give an altogether correct view of the situation. The troops were showing the utmost heroism in stubbornly resisting the enemy's advance, and they were well under the control of their leaders. True, they were at the moment exhausted, and their one desire was for rest. If an armistice were once concluded, it would be most difficult to induce them to continue the struggle against the enemy. But if they were given some breathing space, 'time to sleep and delouse themselves', if they could recuperate in good quarters, their demoralisation would soon disappear. In a week or ten days sufficient forces would be available. These troops could then be told how they had been disgracefully betrayed by the navy and how their food supplies were threatened by a crowd of Jews,<sup>1</sup> war profiteers, slackers and deserters.

<sup>1</sup> Schulenburg's speech is summarised from his two Memoranda of 7 December 1918 and 26 August 1919. It should be noted that the second memorandum makes no mention of the Jews.

There was no question of making the whole army about-face in order to march on Germany and extinguish the revolution. That would be an impracticable operation, but it was not necessary. Why not choose certain nodal points at which to take action against the rebels? Instead of capitulating without a struggle, they should deal with the situation in the spirit of unyielding firmness which it demanded. 'Why not begin by sending picked troops to Verviers, Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, all with the most modern equipment, smoke bombs, gas, bombing squadrons and *flammenwerfer*? . . . They would be able to restore order.'

On a further point, the supplies of the army would hold out for several days. 'You are in occupation of fertile Belgium, which at necessity can supply us for at least a week. The Bolsheviks have not yet cut off our supplies. It remains to be seen whether they will dare to do so. If an appeal were addressed to the country it would rise as one man to free itself from the disgrace of starving its beloved army which has undergone such sufferings.'

The ideal plan was to restore order city by city and by force of arms. There could be no doubt that in such an operation the army would support the Emperor. In this way civil war would be avoided.

Much encouraged, the Emperor immediately agreed with Schulenburg's view, and seemed to

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

recover some of his vitality. 'He did not want civil war, but good troops should immediately be sent to recapture Verviers, Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne.'<sup>1</sup>

General von Plessen hastened to express the same view. 'His Majesty cannot purely and simply capitulate to the revolution. Everything must be done to restore order. The expeditions against Verviers, Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne should be put in hand at once.'<sup>2</sup>

A somewhat long discussion then took place. Gröner maintained his view and pointed out the dangers of Schulenburg's proposal. The revolution was much too far advanced to allow of such operations. The insurgents had already created an organisation which would preclude the success of an offensive. They would cut off supplies. The army could not be counted upon and would not follow the Emperor. At Verviers there had already been an unfortunate check, with troops who were thought to be sound. 'Sire, you have no longer an army.'

Schulenburg contradicted Gröner, and on behalf of the Generals of his army group gave an assurance that the army was still loyal. It could no longer continue the war against the enemy, but it could perfectly well restore order district by district, and reconquer the country in good order

<sup>1</sup> Schulenburg's Memoranda.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of 6 April 1919, drawn up by Plessen, Marschall and Schulenburg.

under the leadership of the Emperor.<sup>1</sup> Neither officers nor soldiers would disgrace themselves by deserting their Sovereign.

During this exchange of views, the Emperor had remained quiet. He now showed traces of nervous excitement. There was an obvious gulf between the opinions of Schulenburg and Gröner. How could the Chief Quartermaster-General have come to admit so disastrous a depreciation in the moral of his troops? Surely he had questioned the army chiefs in a matter of such exceptional importance? Count Schulenburg was opposed to General Gröner's views.

The Chief Quartermaster-General confined himself to replying: 'My information is different.'<sup>2</sup> The Crown Prince wonders what this 'other information' could have been, and who had supplied Gröner with it. The Emperor, whose irritation was noted by Niemann, then turned on Gröner, 'his eyes blazing with anger', and said coldly: 'I must request that you confirm your statement in

<sup>1</sup> The Memorandum of 27 April 1919 contains at this point an interesting detail. Contrary to what the Crown Prince's Chief of Staff thought and stated, among the officers of his army group who were interrogated at Spa in the morning of 9 November, not one believed it possible for the Emperor to reconquer the country at the head of his troops, and four gave ambiguous answers. This may perhaps be some proof of Schulenburg's self-deception; a chivalrous self-deception, but self-deception none the less.

<sup>2</sup> Memoranda of Schulenburg, and *Memoirs of the Crown Prince*.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

writing, but first of all interrogate all the army commanders.'

After this natural revolt of disappointed hope, William II sought for a compromise. He repeated that he did not wish to provoke a civil war, and that he would make no such demand on the army; but he persisted in his desire to lead his army back into Germany in good order after the conclusion of the armistice.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, seeing the necessity of speaking clearly, Gröner once more intervened in the discussion with the object of putting an end to it. 'The army', he said, 'will re-enter Germany as an organised force under the orders of its Generals, but not under those of Your Majesty. The army is no longer with Your Majesty.'<sup>2</sup> 'He spoke', writes the Crown Prince, 'as if any further discussion was useless in view of the programme which he himself had imposed on the conference.' There was no further possibility of temporising. Schulenburg protested warmly and with deep emotion. He repeated at the top of his voice that the army would follow the Emperor if it was a question of reconquering the country. Neither the officers nor the soldiers would so disgrace themselves as to desert their Emperor and King in the face of the enemy.

<sup>1</sup> Memoranda of Schulenburg and Memorandum of 6 April 1919.

<sup>2</sup> According to all witnesses this was Gröner's actual statement word for word. It is reported in all the memoranda on the subject.

Yielding to Schulenburg's insistence, Hindenburg then spoke. Despite his sorrow the Marshal maintained his calm and, as always, endeavoured to be conciliatory. The sentiments and general principles expressed by Count Schulenburg must, he said, be shared by every Prussian officer. Unfortunately, the disastrous news which G.H.Q. had received from the interior and from the army showed, all of it, the impossibility of coping successfully with the revolutionary movement. He could, no more than his Chief Quartermaster-General, take from now on any responsibility, in view of all the circumstances, for the loyalty of the army.<sup>1</sup>

Not knowing what attitude to adopt, the Emperor adjourned the meeting, which had lasted three-quarters of an hour. He was, or appeared to be, resigned. 'Interrogate all the army commanders as to the moral of the army. If they tell me that the army is no longer with me I am ready to go; but not before.'<sup>2</sup> With these words his brow contracted: 'In all his struggles of the last few days against his Ministers and the growing agitation of public opinion, the Emperor

<sup>1</sup> Memoranda of Schulenburg. According to the Memorandum of 6 April 1919, which is the only one to mention this further speech, Gröner added that all the heads of departments at G.H.Q. shared the view expressed by the Marshal.

<sup>2</sup> Memoranda of Schulenburg. Memorandum of 6 April 1919. These army commanders are clearly the officers who had been convened at Spa and whom Colonel Heye was then interrogating. See Chapter IV, pp. 214-230. 7

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

had always been sustained by his firm and proud belief in the loyalty of his soldiers. It appeared that this too was no more than the illusion of a dream.<sup>1</sup>

The Emperor proceeded at once into the garden of the château. It was now about eleven o'clock.

The memorandum published on 27 July 1919 by the protagonists in the drama, Hindenburg, Plessen, Marschall, Schulenburg and Hintze, states that during the morning conference the question of abdication was not touched upon. It was not until the end of this conference that the first request for abdication arrived from Berlin;<sup>2</sup> after that the requests for abdication followed one another with such insistence that the conference had to be adjourned.<sup>3</sup> It is probable that there

<sup>1</sup> Niemann.

<sup>2</sup> Wahnschaffe, the Under-Secretary of State at the Chancellery, has pointed out that the Chancellery had transmitted to Spa a request not for abdication, but for the announcement of the decision already taken by G.H.Q. on the subject of abdication. He recalls the fact that, on his arrival at Spa, Schulenburg learned from Plessen and Marschall that Hindenburg and Gröner were going to explain to the Emperor the necessity for abdication. Furthermore, according to Schulenburg's first memorandum, Gröner and Hindenburg formally stated at the conference that abdication was inevitable. (*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 August 1919.) Max of Baden made the same observations as Wahnschaffe in an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 9 August 1919, which followed shortly on the publication of the Memorandum of 27 July.

<sup>3</sup> Wahnschaffe, at Berlin, had engaged in a regular duel over the telephone with Admiral von Hintze at Spa; for the varying fortunes of this duel, see Chapter III, pp. 180-198.

was no formal question of abdication during the military conference; but although the subject was not spoken of it was in everyone's mind. All evidence showed the impossibility of struggling against the revolution, and this impossibility was emphasised by G.H.Q. Such impossibility meant and logically involved abdication. Schulenburg was right in observing that: 'The content of the statement submitted by G.H.Q. on the morning of 9 November was equivalent to the necessity of abdication. For the Emperor there were only two alternatives, either to restore order at the head of the army, or to bow to the revolution and abdicate.'

\* \* \*

In the garden of La Fraineuse the Emperor was accompanied by the Marshal and his generals; from time to time Hintze and Grünau appeared with the latest news from Berlin. 'The discussion continued in the form of conversations between His Majesty and various groups of persons, and between various groups among themselves.'<sup>1</sup> William II walked to and fro in the garden 'followed by all his generals, but most often with the Marshal'.<sup>2</sup> He was entirely self-controlled, and discussed and argued at length, halting abruptly sometimes, the better to convince his interlocutors, or to develop his own

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919, and Second Memorandum of Schulenburg.

<sup>2</sup> Hintze.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

arguments.<sup>1</sup> Among the various groups there was much shaking of heads, and the general atmosphere was one of despondency.<sup>2</sup> Groner's statement had made a profound impression upon all; and clearly also upon the Emperor. 'He was obviously undecided; his general demeanour was that of melancholy resignation, and betrayed that he had realised the possibility of abdication, and would steel himself to this hard decision.'<sup>3</sup> He was deeply moved by the news telephoned from Berlin, and seemed resolved to sacrifice his own person in order to avoid civil war.<sup>4</sup>

For a few moments Grünau was alone with him. He seized the opportunity to carry out the mission with which he had been entrusted by the Chancellery on the previous evening. 'In the view of the responsible military chiefs,' ran his message, 'abdication was now the only possibility. The Emperor could not allow civil war to break out after four long years of war and privations, on the very eve of the Armistice. In such a case the entire responsibility would fall on him. He would stand accused of having in his selfishness caused the ruin of his country. On the other hand, if he were now to withdraw, the people would be grateful to him for what he had done; they would honour the greatness of his resolution

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann.

<sup>3</sup> Grünau's Report.

<sup>4</sup> First Memorandum of Schulenburg.

and his tragic fate. Such a sacrifice would not be in vain in the interests of the principle of monarchy and of the dynasty.'

In reply, the Emperor rejected any idea of civil war. But he was convinced that in existing circumstances his abdication would lead to the proclamation of a Republic, and that this would render the Reich absolutely powerless. He gave expression to his bitter feelings against the Democratic Government which had done nothing to counteract currents of thought directed against the monarch and the monarchy. In spite of all this, he had willingly agreed to all the schemes of reform and to all the consequent changes of personnel in the Government. But the Government thus created had allowed itself to be dragged at the chariot wheels of the Social Democrats, whose one watchword was 'absolute power'.

In conclusion, the Emperor expressed his readiness to abdicate if such was the will of the German people. 'He had reigned long enough', he said, 'to see how thankless was a monarch's task. He had no intention of clinging to power. He had done his duty in not leaving his post and in refusing to desert his people and his army. It was now up to others to show if they would do better.' Grünau states that the Emperor was ready to draw the inevitable political conclusions from Gröner's speech, and to abdicate at once. But the Kaiser was not for long *tête-à-tête* with Grünau, and, as Admiral von Tirpitz once

remarked:<sup>1</sup> 'It was necessary to talk *tête-à-tête* with the Emperor. The presence of more than one party to the conversation was easily calculated to divert his true personal judgments by playing upon the urge, which was so strong in him, to show himself in all the phases of his character.'

The Emperor was then rejoined by his generals, who had in the meantime continued their conversations. Plessen asserted that, in arriving at a decision on the subject of abdication, it would be necessary to make a clear distinction between the question of the Imperial crown and that of the royal throne of Prussia.

Schulenburg furiously supported von Plessen. The Emperor would be wrong to recede from his decision of the previous day, to restore order at the head of his troops. Gröner had misjudged the situation. All experience at the front showed for certain that the army was with the Monarch. In any case, the Prussian troops remained loyal to their King. They would not desert him, and they would not understand his abdication. 'In any and every circumstance the Emperor should remain King of Prussia. He should gather his Prussians round him, and then see what the Reich would do! If the Emperor's abdication was inevitable, the crown of Prussia at least should be saved from the wreck. This was a purely Prussian question which the Emperor should settle with his Prussian Ministers and his

<sup>1</sup> Von Tirpitz: *My Memoirs*, London, 1919.

Prussian Chambers. Prussian officers and soldiers would not tolerate the *débâcle* which would follow the disappearance of their King. If only for the sake of his brave army, His Majesty should remain King of Prussia.'

Hintze asked Schulenburg whether the Prussian troops were ready to fight for their King against the people. After some hesitation, Schulenburg replied in the negative. But he repeated his view that the Emperor should remain King of Prussia.<sup>1</sup>

The ambiguity thus evolved left the monarch and his most devoted adherents some particle of hope. In Grünau's words it constituted 'a welcome compromise'. William hastened to reassure Plessen and Schulenburg. In any event he would remain King of Prussia and, as such, would not desert his army. The Marshal entirely approved and threw his whole weight into the scale in favour of Schulenburg. On the other hand, Gröner stated—not, it appears before the Emperor, but to Hindenburg and Schulenburg—that a decision of this nature might have been salutary a fortnight ago, but that now it was too late; the course of events had by now precluded any such possibility.

\* \* \*

During these discussions, which began about 11.30 a.m., the Crown Prince arrived. On 8 November he had received, at his Headquarters

<sup>1</sup> Grünau.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

at Waulsort, an unexpected order from the Emperor to present himself at Spa on the following morning.<sup>1</sup> 'Not a word in explanation of this precipitate summons! I knew that it boded no good!' At the Château de la Fraineuse, where he arrived 'shortly after midday', the Crown Prince was received by von Gontard, the Court Marshal.

The Court Marshal was 'careworn and serious of demeanour; to each question I put him he replied by raising his arms helplessly to the skies—which was, after all, a most eloquent method of answering'. At 9 a.m. he had been called to the telephone by the Empress and had informed Potsdam that the Emperor was in good health and that there was no change in the situation since the previous day.<sup>2</sup> But for some long time von Gontard had taken a markedly pessimistic view of the situation. On 29 September, when alone with Count Røedern, Secretary

<sup>1</sup> The Crown Prince's *Memoirs* (*The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922) give a fairly detailed account of the day of 9 November. It is common knowledge that these memoirs were written by Karl Rosner, an experienced novelist, from notes and general indications supplied by the Crown Prince. Count Reventlow has expressed great regret that a Jewish journalist should have been entrusted with the task of expressing the views of a Prince of Aryan stock. The Crown Prince's narrative is most dramatic. But, as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* said on 6 May, 1922: 'It is no light matter to lose a throne which one's family has occupied for centuries. In the circumstances, objectivity is hardly to be looked for in the Crown Prince's story.'

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Prince August Wilhelm.

of State for Finance, he had confided his gloomy presentiments to him: the army was threatened with a great catastrophe; this was the view he had brought away from G.H.Q. When the Minister replied that peace would probably involve the loss for Germany of Alsace-Lorraine, and of a portion of her Eastern provinces, the Court Marshal had replied that this would have to be put up with.<sup>1</sup> He saw complete disaster ahead.

Although bearing the title of General and having had a career in the Army, von Gontard, who had belonged to the Court for twenty-two years, had nothing of the military man about him in his essentially peace-time duties about the Palace. A descendant of the architect of Frederick the Great, this man of fifty-seven, whose naturally sanguine temperament and dark eyes were evidence of the French *émigré* in him,<sup>2</sup> was attached body and soul to the Kaiser.

On being informed of the Crown Prince's arrival, Count Schulenburg ran up, 'pale and visibly a prey to deep emotion', and hastened to advise him of recent developments. In his company, the Crown Prince proceeded at once to the garden, where the Emperor, 'who was gesticulating violently with his right hand', was in the midst of a group 'of about half a dozen

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of Count Rœdern before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag, 20 December 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rosner: *Der König, Weg und Wende*, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

persons in field grey'. 'All these men were visibly wilting under the burden of a situation which had now become untenable and without solution. There they were, frozen in a silence which said more than words, while the Emperor alone continued to talk. . . . From time to time the Emperor's eyes sought the Marshal's, who, without speaking, confined himself to agreeing by a nod. The Emperor also turned frequently towards old General von Plessen as if seeking for his approval.'

As soon as the Emperor saw his son he went towards him and gave him his hand. Hardly leaving him time to greet those present, he began at once to explain the situation to him. 'I was struck by the change in him. His face was pale and thin, his features drawn. . . . It was pitiable to see.' The others drew aside a little, and General Gröner went hastily back to La Fraineuse.

According to his own expressions the Crown Prince brought into this atmosphere of politics 'the simple mentality of a soldier from the front'. He gave his views at once. 'See what you gain by widening the basis of Government? When the process is complete you are shown the door.'<sup>1</sup> He asked whether the sailors had not been already 'stood up against a wall'.<sup>2</sup> He supported Schulenburg's plan with force and conviction.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hintze.

<sup>2</sup> K. F. Nowak: *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Von Plessen.

## THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT SPA

The Emperor informed him of the progress made by the revolution and of the triumph of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. 'His abdication as Emperor seemed to be increasingly necessary, and it was his intention to transfer the supreme command of the German Army to Marshal Hindenburg.' The Crown Prince endeavoured to comfort his father and to show him that all was not yet lost. 'If abdication as Emperor was really inevitable, my father should at least remain indisputably King of Prussia. "Obviously," said the Emperor, and he said this so naturally, while looking me straight in the eyes, that I thought I had already made considerable progress with him in obtaining this single promise which he now gave me.'

The Crown Prince was of opinion that come what might his father should remain with the army. He promised to accompany the Emperor, with his own army group, in order to win back Germany at its head when the opportunity offered itself. Probably these were words rather than advice properly so called.

At this moment General Gröner returned accompanied by Colonel Heye. It was not yet one o'clock.

\* \* \*

Wilhelm Heye, who in 1926 was to succeed General von Seeckt at the head of the German army, and to occupy his high position until his retirement in 1930, was then forty-nine years of age. He had been attached to various staffs on

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

the Eastern front with von Woyrsch's army, and on the Western front with the army group under the command of Duke Albrecht of Wurtemberg, before coming to G.H.Q. in September 1918, where he succeeded Colonel Wetzell as Chief of the Operations Bureau, combining with these duties the direction of various departments which had, until then, been directly subordinate to the Chief Quartermaster-General. The object of this arrangement was to lighten the task of Ludendorff, whose health was likely to be endangered by the appalling amount of overwork to which he was subjected. As early as the end of August 1918, the Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria had mentioned to the Kaiser the 'nervy' condition of Hindenburg's despotic assistant.<sup>1</sup>

Niemann praises Heye, who had 'distinguished himself to an extraordinary degree as a staff officer', for his outstanding qualities as 'a soldier and a man'. Ludendorff praises the firmness of his character and the clarity of his intelligence. His attitude in November, although far less harshly criticised than that of General Gröner, has been somewhat acridly discussed, in particular by Colonel Bauer and General Kabisch, and Heye has seen fit to justify himself.<sup>2</sup>

Colonel Heye's mission was to ask thirty-nine officers of high rank, commanding units at the front, who had arrived at Spa on the morning of

<sup>1</sup> Niemann: *Kaiser und Revolution*, Berlin, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> In an article in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, No. 37, 1922.

9 November, what was the attitude of the troops to the Emperor and to Bolshevism. Could the Emperor at the head of his troops 'reconquer the Fatherland by force of arms'? Would the troops fight 'the Bolshevists on the home front'?<sup>1</sup>

When requested to report to the Emperor on the results of his enquiry, Heye made his communication 'in his usual sonorous tones'.<sup>2</sup> An armistice, and an immediate armistice, was necessary for the army, which would not fight against the revolution in Germany under the orders of the Emperor. 'The troops remain loyal to His Majesty, but they are tired and indifferent and want nothing except rest and peace. At the present moment they would not march against Germany, even with Your Majesty at their head. They would not march against Bolshevism. They want one thing only—an armistice at the earliest possible moment. For the conclusion of an armistice every hour gained is of importance.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For this meeting, see Chapter IV, pp. 214-230.

<sup>2</sup> Hintze.

<sup>3</sup> Memoranda of Schulenburg, and Memorandum of 27 July 1919. These memoranda give the number of officers who replied in the affirmative, in the negative, or ambiguously to the questions put them. The exact figures were not available until a little after this interview with the Emperor, since Colonel Heye had been summoned to La Fraineuse before he had finished the enquiry. Heye could mention only the replies given by the officers whom he had had time to consult. Since he had already interrogated 75 per cent. of the officers present, he was entitled to be exact as to the conclusions which he could draw from his consultations.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

'Colonel Heye's communication was made in the presence of all those who had met at the Château and were about His Majesty. A long silence followed.'

In his enthusiasm for the Emperor, Schulenburg was still strong enough to break this terrible silence. He continued his arguments. The troops could be counted upon if an excessive effort were not demanded of them. They would remain loyal if all that was asked was that they should return to Germany and restore order at certain points. Faced with the direct question whether they would abandon their 'War Lord' and renounce their oath to their colours, there was no doubt that they would support the Emperor. Certain corps had wavered, but the mass of the troops was still disciplined and loyal to the Monarch.

'In reply, General Groner merely shrugged his shoulders and raised his upper lip with an expression of deep regret.'<sup>2</sup> 'Oath to the colours? War Lord? These are only words, an idea.' Groner has been violently reproached by the monarchists for this phrase. The monarchists have endeavoured to perceive in it the mark of an ultra-modern and wellnigh revolutionary spirit. Nevertheless, it did no more than express an opinion of a purely military nature. In a civil

<sup>1</sup> Hintze.

<sup>2</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm: *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

war the oath of allegiance is not enough to maintain the loyalty of the troops to their Sovereign.

Schulenburg replied by reproaching Gröner with not knowing the spirit of the army and with not 'having his finger on its pulse'. In the circumstances, his words assumed the nature of a challenge. They were the words of a general who, from his experiences at the fighting front, was speaking to one of his colleagues whom he considered less as a captain in the field than as a technician and an organiser. Later, Schulenburg was to recall the fact that Gröner came from the Ukraine, that he had succeeded Ludendorff only a few days previously—he had arrived at Spa only on 30 October. Thus the Chief Quarter-master-General could not know the troops on the Western front. 'In the trenches and under fire is where one gets to know the moral of the army. The favourite reading of the men is the Bible and certain of the Psalms. Their high sentiments of duty are coupled with a profound sense of religion. The army which for four and a half years has done its duty, and is permeated with such a spirit, would be incapable, even when foredone and exhausted by battle, of breaking its oath and deserting its King.'

Thus the two army chiefs were at grips. One bowed before the reality of facts; the other, with the tenacity of his illusions which he pushed to a wellnigh blind obstinacy, seemed the very incarnation of old Prussia. 'Two worlds diametrically



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

opposed were brought face to face;—two conceptions between which the gulf was too great to be bridged.’<sup>1</sup>

The Emperor asked whether, without him, the army would return to Germany in good order. Gröner said, yes; Schulenburg, no. Colonel Heye intervened to dissipate any vain imaginings. ‘It is only under the command of its Generals that the army will return in good order to the Fatherland. From this point of view the army leaders have their troops well in hand. If Your Majesty wishes to march with them the troops will ask nothing better and will be delighted; but the army will fight no more, either abroad or at home.’<sup>2</sup> Any appeal to arms would be an illusion.

Against this argument Schulenburg fought an obstinate losing battle. ‘The army’, he said, ‘would not fight against an enemy within the country, but His Majesty could well return to the Fatherland at the head of his troops.’ At this point Admiral von Hintze intervened in the discussion. ‘This idea seemed to me to bear no relation to the realities of the moment. I openly declared before His Majesty, and before all present, that His Majesty had no need of an army in order to take a walk. His Majesty needed an army which would fight for him.’

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

Schulenburg was speaking again<sup>1</sup> when von Hintze, who had departed for a space, returned with a decisive message from Berlin. It was from the Chancellor and was 'an urgent request to His Majesty to save a desperate situation by abdicating'. It was now 1.15 p.m.

'The Emperor', writes the Crown Prince, 'received the news in dumb stolidity, his lips pinched and bloodless, his face pale, as though he had aged in a moment by several years. Only those who knew him well, as I did, could judge of the effort which he was making to master his emotion and to allow no sign of it to appear. When Hintze had finished the Emperor made a slight movement of his head and with his eyes sought the eyes of the Marshal, as if he might find there some aid and comfort in his misfortune. . . . The grand old man, in deep emotion, preserved an impenetrable and helpless silence. . . . The Emperor was now alone. . . . My father's voice was distressingly choked by his emotion when he briefly ordered Hintze to telephone to the Chancellor.'

Though Hintze's language is less theatrical his evidence is yet more moving.

'The Emperor remained sunk in thought for one or two moments. Then, without discussion with me or anyone else, he ordered me to transmit his decision to Berlin. He would abdicate as German Emperor, but not as King of Prussia.'

<sup>1</sup> Both Schulenburg and the Crown Prince note this detail.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

The Emperor then proceeded to dictate on the spot the following message:

(1) That an armistice should at once be concluded;

(2) That in order to save bloodshed (since there was no chance of success for a war in Germany), he would abdicate as German Emperor, but not as King of Prussia. His Majesty would remain King of Prussia in order to prevent the entire disintegration of the army, which would be deprived of its leaders owing to the simultaneous resignation of its officers;

(3) That His Majesty was opposed to civil war;

(4) That His Majesty would order Marshal von Hindenburg to take the command of the German Field Army, and would in all probability himself remain with the Prussian troops.

It would appear that this message might have been transmitted directly to Berlin, with the omission probably of a superfluous and somewhat disturbing sentence ('since there was no chance of success for a war in Germany'). But in the case of a document of such importance, Hintze was opposed to an improvised text, and states that he requested Grünau, Marschall and Schulenburg to help him in drafting a final text. It was essential, he said, to weigh and discuss the exact terms of the message. It is now a question whether Hintze must bear the heavy responsibility for this decision, which Max of Baden reprobates so strongly in his

*Memoirs.* Schulenburg openly claims it.<sup>1</sup> In his view, the document could be communicated to the Chancellor only after its approval and ratification in good and due form by the Emperor.

Interrupted as it was by incessant telephone calls from Berlin,<sup>2</sup> the drafting of this act was a laborious business. After the lapse of about half or three-quarters of an hour it was submitted to William II, who signed it. Its terms were as follows:

(1) His Majesty assents to the German Government's empowering the Armistice Commission, now with the enemy, to conclude an agreement immediately, even before the armistice conditions have become known here;

(2) To avoid bloodshed His Majesty is ready to abdicate as German Kaiser, but not as King of Prussia. His Majesty also desires to remain King

<sup>1</sup> First Memorandum of Schulenburg. 'I urged that His Majesty's decision should in the first instance be put in writing, and that it should not be telephoned to the Chancellor until it had been definitely approved and signed by His Majesty. Upon which His Majesty instructed von Hintze, Generals von Plessen and von Marschall and myself to draft the declaration.' Schulenburg makes no further mention of the matter in his second Memorandum, but the Crown Prince confirms the version given in the first Memorandum. Among those invited to help in the drafting he also mentions von Plessen, of whom there is no question in Hintze's notes, and he makes no mention of Grünau who is mentioned by Hintze. It is true that Grünau might be considered as Hintze's secretary.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter III, pp. 180-198.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

of Prussia in order to prevent the army from becoming leaderless and breaking up, in consequence of the resignation of the majority of officers which would be simultaneous with such abdication;

(3) His Majesty does not desire a civil war;

(4) His Majesty, on abdication as German Kaiser, will command Marshal von Hindenburg to take over the supreme command of the German army, and will in August Person remain with the Prussian troops. Further decisions would be reserved for the Imperial Administrator [Lieutenant-General of the Empire];

(5) The army commanders and the Supreme Command are of the opinion that the abdication of the German Kaiser and Supreme War Lord at this moment will provoke the gravest convulsions in the army, and they can therefore no longer assume responsibility for the army holding together.

(Signed) WILLIAM, I.R.

G.H.Q., 9 November 1919.

A comparison of the above document with the improvised note which the Emperor dictated to Hintze is of considerable interest.

The Armistice, it will be noted, should be concluded at all costs, even before its conditions are known 'here', *i.e.* at Spa, at G.H.Q. On the same day, at 8 p.m., Erzberger was to receive from G.H.Q. a wireless message in which, after certain modifications of the armistice conditions

were asked for, the final sentence was the following shattering phrase: 'If you do not succeed in obtaining these modifications you must none the less conclude an armistice.'<sup>1</sup> Wahnschaffe, at his end of the telephone in Berlin, was surprised to hear that such wide powers had been granted to the Armistice Commission.<sup>2</sup>

The document as despatched mentions a Lieutenant-General of the Empire (Imperial Administrator). As William II remained King of Prussia, the Reich would have had a Lieutenant-General, just as Hindenburg was to receive the supreme command of the army of the Reich instead of the Emperor. The question arises, who would have been this Lieutenant-General? Hintze had conceived the idea that the name of Prince Eitel Fritz was being canvassed, and on the previous evening he had raised the question with the Chancellor, who had given him no definite reply. Max of Baden had from time to time had the hope that he might save the monarchy if he himself became Lieutenant-General of the Reich. William II had come to dislike Prince Max intensely; but it would still have been possible for him to agree to the appointment. He did not, however, have to do so.

It will be noted that the Kaiser's message threw the full responsibility for abdication upon the

<sup>1</sup> Erzberger, *Ergebnisse im Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> 'I was unaware that the Emperor had been asked to grant such wide powers.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Chancellor. The essential difference between the message and the instructions dictated by William II is that the former does not speak of this abdication, which in any case was a partial one, as a sacrifice definitely made, a sacrifice to which the Sovereign had in all sincerity resigned himself. It spoke only of the Emperor's 'readiness' to abdicate, 'to avoid bloodshed', and above all, civil war.<sup>1</sup> The Crown Prince pointed out with reason as a conclusion: 'Thereafter it was for the Chancellor to make a further report on the situation created in the country as the result of the Imperial message, and it was not until after such further report had been received by the Emperor that the Emperor could decide definitely what remained for him to do.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus, according to the interpretation placed upon the Monarch's instructions by the Imperial entourage, there was no question of anything but

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Crown Prince*.—Note that the Monarch was 'ready to abdicate' as Emperor; 'in the event of abdication', he would give the supreme command to Hindenburg.—Similarly, whereas William II's original instructions stated that 'in all probability' he would remain with the Prussian troops, the actual act of abdication contained the formal declaration 'will in August Person remain with the Prussian troops'.

<sup>2</sup> So also Schulenburg in his second Memorandum: 'The Emperor did not proclaim his abdication. It was the Chancellor's duty to inform him whether such abdication was inevitable in order to prevent bloodshed, and, in the affirmative, to make some proposal with a view to giving legal effect to the decision which in such a case the Emperor would take.'

a possible and conditional abdication as Emperor, but not as King, in the event of the Chancellor persisting, despite the views attributed to the Generals,<sup>1</sup> in demanding abdication. The underlying idea that the sacrifice of abdication might possibly not be required was scarcely hidden.

Was it possible for the Kaiser to abdicate as Emperor without abdicating as King of Prussia? Under the Constitution of the Empire, as drawn up in 1871, a German emperor existed only because there was a king. According to Article 11 of the Constitution of the Empire 'the Presidency of the Confederation belongs to the King of Prussia, who bears the name of German Emperor'. Thus the King becomes 'German Emperor' by the fact that he is King of Prussia. The title of Emperor is bound up with the Prussian crown and cannot be separated from it. If William II ceased to be Emperor it could only be because he ceased to be King of Prussia; and the King who succeeded him in Prussia would be *de jure* German Emperor.

<sup>1</sup> In saying that 'the army commanders and the Supreme Command are of the opinion that the abdication of the German Kaiser and Supreme War Lord at this moment will provoke the very gravest convulsions in the army', the Imperial message presented the facts in a somewhat singular fashion. It is probable that the military leaders took the view that abdication would undermine the moral of the army; but Ludendorff's successor had the whole of G.H.Q. with him in thinking that such a decision was inevitable, and Hindenburg had agreed with this view.



Professor Thoma of Heidelberg University states that there has never been any doubt on the question among jurists, and comes to the conclusion that General Schulenburg gave proof of 'the most appalling error of judgment in suggesting partial abdication'. He quotes various authors in support of his view.<sup>1</sup>

'Never for a moment', said von Simons,<sup>2</sup> 'could we have dreamt of anything so constitutionally and politically impossible as a partial abdication.' The Chancellor could not conceive how William could possibly, even for a moment, have consented to such an attitude, which was contrary to the fundamental law of the Empire; its effect was to divide the Imperial and Royal power into two separate parts.<sup>3</sup>

The Vice-Chancellor von Payer merely writes that at the moment people in Berlin did not know 'whether to laugh or to cry' at the Emperor's

<sup>1</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 21 August 1919.—Albert Haenel, *Studien zum deutschen Staatsrecht*, Vol. II, 1880, pp. 56 *et seq.*—Laband, *Das Staatsrecht des deutschen Reichs*, Vol. V, 1911, pp. 217–20.—George Meyer-Anschutz, *Lehrbuch des deutschen Staatsrechts*, 1914, p. 500.—P. Abraham, *Der Thronverzicht nach deutschem Staatsrecht*, Berlin, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> According to Max of Baden.

<sup>3</sup> In his second Memorandum, Schulenburg observes that the Chancellor's programme—namely, abdication, the appointment of a Lieutenant-General, and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly—was not provided for either in the Imperial Constitution. Similarly, Niemann persists in his view that the scheme recommended by Schulenburg was 'a perfectly practical suggestion'.

communication. 'As though there was any time left for such juristic subtleties!' Wahnschaffe, the Under-Secretary of State at the Chancellery, gives his view less brusquely but quite as clearly: 'The idea that His Majesty would abdicate as Emperor and not as King was a profound surprise to me. The procedure seemed to me utterly impossible, in the first place, for constitutional reasons. Unless the fundamental basis of the Imperial Constitution were altered it was impossible to imagine a King of Prussia who was not at the same time Emperor. Moreover, a partial abdication of this kind would never have had the political effect expected of it. I said so at once to Herr von Hintze.'

It is easy to imagine the 'political effect' which William's abdication as Emperor and not as King would have had. His *enemies* in Germany, and yet more out of Germany, would have seen in such a decision a species of hypocritical *camouflage*, a feint intended to lull or deceive them, and to reserve some means of regaining absolute power at the first opportunity. They would have trumpeted their view that his abdication as Emperor meant nothing unless he also abdicated as King. In actual fact, the Imperial throne, albeit a more exalted dignity, was no more than an accessory, and its real support was the throne of Prussia.

## II

*News of Prince Max's Proclamation—Meeting at Hindenburg's Quarters—Further Conference with the Emperor.*

HAVING decided on partial abdication, William II retired to La Fraineuse while Hintze, Schulenburg and Marschall drafted the act of abdication. He lunched with the Crown Prince and his immediate circle. The general atmosphere was one of consternation. 'The Emperor's features were drawn, and he kept nervously biting his upper lip. Conversation was out of the question. One or two words passed in an undertone. It was difficult to swallow even a mouthful of food. Those were painful moments.'<sup>1</sup> 'That silent gathering, in that cheerful, well-lit room, where, round a table decorated with freshly cut flowers, there was gathered nothing but anxiety, misery and despair, will always remain one of my saddest memories.'<sup>2</sup>

Lunch was not a long affair, and the party soon broke up. The Emperor proceeded to the drawing-room. Here he was engaged with the Crown Prince and Schulenburg—who, after the completion of his draft, had again put in an

<sup>1</sup> Niemann.

<sup>2</sup> The Crown Prince.—The accounts given by Niemann and the Crown Prince would seem to show that the Emperor lunched at La Fraineuse, not, as was his usual custom, in the Imperial train. Cf. Nowak, *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

appearance—‘when suddenly Plessen arrived with the information that Hintze had received a further message of a yet more disconcerting nature, from the Chancellery’.<sup>1</sup> ‘The door of the room opened, and an agitated voice was heard calling: “Sire, would you be so good as to come here for a moment?”’<sup>2</sup> Hintze had not yet left the telephone. William at once went to him, and learnt that the Chancellor had, through the Wolff Bureau, announced his abdication not only as Emperor, but as King of Prussia.<sup>3</sup> ‘Not even the dignity of King of Prussia; he was to be neither Emperor nor King.’<sup>4</sup> In the crowning catastrophe of his life, he had been degraded to the humiliating rôle of a spectator.

‘Over my head’, he wrote, ‘the Chancellor had himself proclaimed my abdication, which had not yet been decided, and the renunciation of the succession by the Crown Prince, who had not been approached in the matter. He had handed the government over to the Socialists and had made Herr Ebert Chancellor! The wireless was spreading the news everywhere. The whole army had heard it. Thus they took out of my hands the decision whether I would stay or go, and whether or no I would abandon the Imperial title and retain the royal crown of Prussia.’

It was not yet 2.15 p.m. The Crown Prince

<sup>1</sup> The Crown Prince.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter III, pp. 169–170.

<sup>4</sup> René Viviani, *Réponse au Kaiser*, Paris, 1923.

had gone back into the dining-room with Schulenburg, both in a fever of anticipation. They were well aware that something altogether unexpected had just occurred, 'something calculated yet further to upset a situation already fraught with confusion and dismay'. After some 'minutes which seemed like centuries', the Emperor returned and during the next few moments they remained 'in stricken silence, unable to speak. . . . The ground seemed to give way under our feet'. The Emperor, who was endeavouring to 'maintain some show of his natural poise and dignity', was stirred to the depths of his being and kept expressing his wonder 'whether what he had just heard could be true'.<sup>1</sup> He asked Schulenburg his advice. 'It is a *coup d'état*,' said Schulenburg, 'an act of violence to which Your Majesty should not yield. The crown of Prussia belongs to Your Majesty and it is absolutely necessary that Your Majesty, as War Lord, should remain with the army. I guarantee that the troops will remain loyal to Your Majesty. "I am", he said, "King of Prussia, and I will remain King. As such I will stay with my troops."'<sup>2</sup>

The Kaiser's entourage was stirred by 'the liveliest emotion', and by 'righteous indignation' at the Berlin *coup d'état*, which certain of them characterised as a 'traitor's blow'.<sup>3</sup> Von Gontard

<sup>1</sup> The Crown Prince.

<sup>2</sup> Schulenburg, Memoranda of 6 April and 27 July 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Niemann.

announced the fall of the Emperor and the Crown Prince, 'hardly breathing, his teeth chattering and his eyes filled with tears'. The Emperor then reappeared in the drawing-room with the cry, 'Treason, Gentlemen! Barefaced, outrageous treason!' With feverish haste he filled telegraph form after telegraph form 'with a manifesto of protest'.<sup>1</sup>

The Crown Prince supported Schulenburg in begging the Emperor to resist. He found 'some support' from Marschall and, 'above all', from Plessen. 'Plessen's chivalrous loyalty was utterly revolted by the dastardly action taken against the Emperor and the dynasty. Both a soldier and a man of the world, used to the strict observance of forms, weighty and reserved in manner, he made no attempt to qualify what he considered the proper terms for these anti-dynastic manœuvres.'<sup>2</sup> The Crown Prince, supported by Schulenburg, proposed that he should himself take over the business of restoring order in Germany, beginning with Cologne. 'This suggestion was not even considered by the Emperor, who was absolutely opposed to civil war.' In truth, the Emperor's anger tended to spend itself in words and did not get as far as deeds.

William II instructed Niemann, with the help of General von Estorff, to send off 'certain private telegrams'. These were to be coded, and arms were to be collected at La Fraineuse. He asked

<sup>1</sup> Niemann.

<sup>2</sup> The Crown Prince.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Plessen, Marschall and Hintze to inform Hindenburg and Gröner, who had left La Fraineuse, of the new development.<sup>1</sup> He took leave of the Crown Prince, who was bound for his new Headquarters at Vielsalm in Luxemburg. 'At this moment he gave the impression of knowing what he wanted'; his attitude of determination had a calming effect on his son. 'I had no idea when I shook his hand that I should not see him for a year, and then in Holland.'

On leaving La Fraineuse, the Crown Prince made a statement to the soldiers of the Rohr battalion, who were on duty at the doors, that he was returning to his army group and that the troops should maintain their *sang-froid*. The Emperor had promised not to abdicate and not to leave Spa. The Rohr battalion should continue to watch over his safety. The soldiers greeted the Crown Prince with acclamations. He had on several occasions inspected this particular battalion, and was popular with it.<sup>2</sup>

The Crown Prince reacted violently against the 'unprecedented action' of Prince Max. No one had ever approached him on the subject of his

<sup>1</sup> According to the Crown Prince, the Emperor also instructed them to notify the Marshal of the decision he had just taken, namely, to remain as King of Prussia at the head of such troops as could be collected at G.H.Q.

<sup>2</sup> The accuracy of this account, given by Niemann, was confirmed by an eyewitness to Lieutenant von Schwerin, who has told the story of the part played at Spa by the Rohr battalion.

renunciation of the throne. He had been neither 'sounded, interrogated, nor listened to' on the subject.<sup>1</sup> The Chancellor's view had been that the abdication of William II would naturally involve the renunciation of the throne by the Crown Prince, and all the Chancellor's entourage viewed the question in the same light. More even than his father, the heir to the throne was considered as a man with whom the enemy would refuse to treat, as an 'obstacle to peace'.<sup>2</sup> In the event of the Kaiser's abdicating, no one supposed that the Crown Prince would succeed. 'According to the views then generally held, such an event would not have solved, but would have doubled, the difficulties of the situation.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Memoranda of 6 April and 27 July 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Prince Max*.—The Chancellor expresses regret that it was impossible for him to have an interview with the Crown Prince on the subject of his renunciation of the throne. He points out that there were difficulties in the way of such an interview; since the Emperor would not allow the question of his abdication to be raised, it was impossible to discuss renunciation with the Crown Prince. Furthermore, the Chancellor's pet plan was the appointment of a Lieutenant-General of the Empire who, without prejudicing future developments, would for some time have discharged the duties of a sovereign. One of the reasons which induced the Chancellor to prefer this system to the accession of one of William II's grandsons, under a regency, was exactly because, with a Lieutenant-General of the Empire, it would be unnecessary to raise the question of renunciation with the Crown Prince.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich von Payer, *Von Bethmann Hollweg bis Ebert*, Frankfurt, 1923.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Schulenburg, whose intention it was to leave Spa at the same time as the Crown Prince, his immediate chief, went to take leave of the Emperor. He had already left the Presence when William called him back. After thanking him for his devotion, the Kaiser repeated, 'I shall remain King of Prussia. I refuse to abdicate as King of Prussia, and I shall stay with the troops.' 'Let Your Majesty', said Schulenburg, 'come to us, among your troops at the Front. There Your Majesty will be safe. Your Majesty promises me in any case to stay with the army?' 'Yes,' said William, 'I will stay with the army.'

After kissing<sup>1</sup> the 'dear, strong' hand held out to him by the Emperor, Schulenburg visited the Marshal, at whose quarters a sort of informal Council of War had been convened by von Hintze.<sup>2</sup> His presence at the meeting could not but be agreeable to the Emperor.

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> In his *Memoirs*, Count Czernin, ex-Chancellor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, sharply criticises this custom of kissing hands, which at the Court of Berlin was 'something quite ordinary'. 'At Vienna', he says, 'one would never have seen high officials kissing the Emperor's hand. Even the most servile would never have stooped to it.' *Im Weltkrieg*, Berlin, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Memoirs*, the Crown Prince makes the following statement based on information supplied to him by his Chief of Staff: 'Schulenburg having pointed out to the Emperor that it would be improper to allow the Revolutionary Government in Berlin to conclude the armistice, His Majesty requested the General to visit Marshal von Hindenburg in order to transmit to him the order to take charge of the negotiations and to

The meeting which Hintze had organised in the Marshal's quarters began about 3.30 p.m. At it the Admiral raised three questions:

(1) *Was it materially possible to cancel the abdication proclaimed in Berlin?*

To this question the soldiers replied in the negative, according to Hintze. Schulenburg makes Hindenburg and Gröner responsible for this decision, since they were convinced that last-minute efforts would only end in civil war and thus aggravate the disaster in the field.

(2) *Would it be desirable to publish a protest against the Berlin proclamation which announced the Emperor's abdication without his consent?*

On this point, says Hintze, the decision was unanimous. In existing circumstances the publication of such a protest would be unfortunate, but it would be desirable to draw up a written protest as a document for use in the future.<sup>1</sup> The protest was to be submitted for the Emperor's

assume responsibility for them.' This strange story, which is apparently nowhere else referred to, would explain Schulenburg's presence at the conference held a little later in Hindenburg's quarters. Major Niemann confines himself to the statement: 'The situation demanded cool examination. Count Schulenburg was to proceed to the Marshal.'

<sup>1</sup> Hintze fails to add in his *Notes* that this procedure was adopted on his proposal. This is explicitly stated in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919, in the drafting of which he collaborated, as also in Schulenburg's Memorandum of 26 August 1919. The suggestion has sometimes been attributed to Gröner, cf. Nowak, *The Collapse of Central Europe*, London, 1924.

signature and thereafter deposited 'in some safe place, *i.e.* in the Ministry of the Royal Household or the office of the Military Private Secretary'.

(3) *How was the Emperor's safety to be ensured?*

It was necessary to determine to what place the Emperor should withdraw, and discussion centred mainly round this question. 'A discussion ensued on the place of retreat which the Kaiser should choose, should the course of events compel him to leave Germany. It was decided that Holland should be proposed.'

Hintze, whose account of the discussion is in somewhat involved terms, takes pains to throw the full responsibility on the soldiers;<sup>1</sup> and indeed it seemed that they were the proper people to assume such responsibility. 'The soldiers pointed out that the possible extension of the revolutionary movement to the army would prevent any further guarantee of security being given. The question was then considered in what portion of the army the safety of the Monarch could best be assured. It was found impossible to decide upon any particular group, since the army as a whole was exposed to the revolutionary contagion. That His Majesty should return to Germany was con-

<sup>1</sup> Although an ex-Admiral, Hintze clearly did not consider himself as being one of 'the soldiers'. He was the representative of the Foreign Office at Spa; he had been Minister of Foreign Affairs and had been chosen by that Office to represent it at G.H.Q.

sidered to be inopportune and wellnigh impossible, as a result of the insurrection and the occupation of the Rhine bridge-heads by the insurgents. *As regards the possible departure of His Majesty for a neutral country*, the comparative advantages of Switzerland and Holland were discussed. It was agreed that Holland was easier to reach.'

Schulenburg held language far less diplomatic. He bitterly reproached Gröner, who, he said, seemed to consider the news from Berlin as the most natural thing in the world. 'Gröner replied that in fact he was not surprised at the news, that he had foreseen what would happen and that the course of events could no longer be controlled.' Furthermore, Schulenburg coupled the declarations of the Chief Quartermaster-General with those of Hindenburg. 'The Marshal and Gröner stated that the Emperor should at once leave G.H.Q. and proceed to Holland. They could no longer guarantee his safety even for the forthcoming night. The Rohr battalion, which was on duty at Imperial Headquarters, was no longer sound, and bands of revolutionaries were already on the march from Verviers to Spa.' According to his own evidence, Schulenburg was alone in maintaining that the safety of the Monarch was not yet compromised in the army, and that it would be 'a serious mistake to abandon the troops, who would not be able to hold out against the resulting demoralisation.' The others, namely

Hintze and Marschall, supported the Marshal. Hintze was requested to take the necessary steps with the Foreign Office to ensure the immediate departure of His Majesty for Holland.<sup>1</sup>

Grünau confirms and adds detail to the information given by Schulenburg. 'With the approval of the Marshal,' he says, 'General Gröner stated that the personal safety of the Emperor could no longer be guaranteed at G.H.Q. He had learned that the troops at G.H.Q. itself were on the point of forming Soldiers' Councils, and that no reliance could be placed even in the Rohr battalion, which had taken up guard duty in place of the troops who had remained at Potsdam. It was to be feared that the revolutionary movement, which had already reached Aix-la-Chapelle, would reach G.H.Q., and that the revolutionaries would endeavour to obtain possession of Army Headquarters. The heavy conditions which were to be expected as preliminaries to an armistice, together with the progress of the revolution, eliminated all hope of withdrawing the army in good order. It would, on the contrary, straggle back to Germany in the utmost confusion. It was impossible any longer to contemplate the Emperor staying at the Front. The retreat of the army made that impossible, and a false interpretation would be

<sup>1</sup> The Memorandum of 6 April 1919 confirms this latter point, which, as will be seen (pp. 245-246), is not without importance.

placed upon the Emperor's action in Germany itself.'

It would appear that Schulenburg stayed until the end of the conference.<sup>1</sup> He did not, however, seek further audience with the Emperor, but went direct to his headquarters. The Crown Prince had already left, and the military situation urgently demanded his presence with his army group. The Crown Prince regrets as 'a serious error' the fact that neither Schulenburg nor himself remained at Spa, or that they did not carry off the Emperor to his own headquarters at Vielsalm, which was not more than an hour's motor-car run from Spa. If the Crown Prince is to be believed, Schulenburg left Spa only because he remembered 'the unalterable decisions of the Emperor' at the moment when he took leave of him. But it is not easy to reconcile this statement with the account given by the officers who accompanied Schulenburg. These officers stated that Schulenburg said to them in a state of profound emotion and the liveliest indignation: 'We have just been at the Marshal's villa, discussing the question of sending His Majesty away this very night to Holland.'

<sup>1</sup> This is stated in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919, in the drafting of which Schulenburg himself collaborated. Moreover, the officers who had accompanied him to Spa, and whose recollections are referred to by the Crown Prince in his *Memoirs*, state that Schulenburg did not return to the Hotel Britannique until about 4.30 p.m.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

The Marshal himself agreed to undertake the task of acquainting the Emperor with the replies given to Hintze's three questions. It was about 4 p.m. 'We went to His Majesty,' writes Hintze. 'The Emperor received our somewhat numerous delegation<sup>1</sup> with the cry, "My God, (*Herrje!*) you back again already?" He stated that he had instructed the Crown Prince to inform the troops that he would remain King of Prussia, but that he had abdicated as Emperor. He then turned towards General Gröner and said, 'You have no longer a War Lord.'<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Monarch lost no time in breaking off all relations with the Chief Quartermaster-General, although without reproaching him directly in any way. His attitude of anger towards Gröner had been succeeded by a fit of sulkiness.

The whole of this scene is recounted with masterly discretion in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919. 'The Emperor once again condemned the act of violence committed by the Imperial Chancellor, and asserted that he had declared his readiness to renounce the Imperial Crown only.' Vainly William sought for some

<sup>1</sup> There were five persons in all—Hindenburg, Gröner, Marschall, Hintze and Grünau. It would appear that Plessen came later. Hintze notes that he was present, and this is confirmed by the Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Gröner was, as has been said, a Wurtemberger, and therefore owed no further allegiance to William of Prussia, since there was no longer an Emperor William.

movement of approbation or sign of encouragement in the group around him; but all kept silence since they had lost all confidence. Hintze confines himself to the statement that 'His Majesty's declarations took up a good deal of time'.

Finally, Hindenburg spoke. 'He gave a summary of the results of the recent conference. He showed that the army was not strong enough to subdue the revolution. He mentioned Hintze's proposal of a protest which would not be published at the moment. . . . Finally, he came to the question of His Majesty's place of residence.' As Hintze reports, 'he set forth with complete lucidity the questions which the conference had considered and the replies given to each of the questions'. According to Gontard and Niemann,<sup>1</sup> he stated: 'I cannot accept the responsibility of seeing the Emperor haled to Berlin by insurgent troops and delivered over as a prisoner to the Revolutionary Government.'

Hindenburg's statement concluded with the words, 'I must advise Your Majesty to abdicate and to proceed to Holland.' This is what General von Marschall stated on 6 and 7 April

<sup>1</sup> Gontard and Niemann were not present at the conference but they had first-hand knowledge of it. In Holland, they drew up a memorandum which is reproduced in Niemann's *Revolution von oben* . . . The language which their memorandum ascribes to Hindenburg corresponds in all essentials to the discussions which took place in the conference and, in actual form, with what Hindenburg said a little later in the presence of Admiral Scheer.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

1919 in the presence of Hintze and Schulenburg, as also in the presence of Count Westarp, one of the leaders of the National Party. On 9 April 1919 Marschall repeated this declaration in the most formal manner possible before the same persons and before General von Plessen, who had also heard Hindenburg. Von Plessen confirmed the fact that the Marshal had said, 'I must advise Your Majesty to proceed to Holland,' but did not remember whether the Marshal had also advised the Emperor to 'abdicate'. Hintze hastily took note of these declarations, as he did of any which tended to minimise the importance of the part he played on 9 November in forming the Emperor's decision.

Details are lacking as to the discussion which took place in the presence of the Emperor after the Marshal's statement. No doubt with the purest of motives, Hintze confines himself to the statement: 'I thought, and I had hoped, that the first question would lead to a long discussion on either side; but such was not the case. The second question involved no more discussion than the first, and all interest was concentrated on the third question, that of the safety of the Emperor.'

According to the Memorandum of 27 July 1919, His Majesty stated that he was in agreement with the idea of a protest which would not at once be published, and said that thenceforward the Marshal should take the supreme command and lead the army back into Germany.

The reasons which in the morning prevented him from remaining with the army were still operative, and had even been strengthened by events. The road to Germany was barred, since the insurgents occupied the Rhine bridge-heads. Moreover, the Armistice was imminent. The German armistice delegation had crossed the frontier lines on 7 November. The troops to which His Majesty would go, whatever troops they might be, would have no longer to fight the enemy, but only to return to Germany.

'On the basis of the preceding discussions, and in accordance with Herr von Hintze's advice and that of the other persons present, His Majesty's departure for a neutral State was contemplated as the final expedient, and Holland was considered from this point of view to be the country indicated.'

According to Hintze, General von Plessen intervened in the discussion on various occasions, crying out, 'Above all, no flight.' The 'competent authorities'—here the Admiral is clearly speaking of the soldiers—explained 'the difficulty of guaranteeing the Emperor's safety if, as was probable, the revolution affected the army'.

In such a discussion the fate of Nicholas II was an ever-present nightmare. 'Might not a similar fate threaten the Kaiser? . . . Would the German people submit to the eternal shame which would be inflicted upon it by the lowest of the low, in an attempt on the life of him who for thirty years had been the symbol of its dignity and

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

grandeur?'<sup>1</sup> Only a few months had elapsed since the tragedy of Ekaterinenberg. Perhaps also there was some recollection of the sombre prophecies of Heine, who, with the utmost precision of detail, had pictured the march of the Kaiser to the guillotine, and had asserted that 1793 would be a picnic compared with the German revolution.

At this point, Baron von Münchhausen, who was second in command, after General von Plessen, of the Imperial Household Troops, was summoned into conference. According to his evidence the troops in Spa and the neighbourhood were at the moment sound, but he prudently refused to give any guarantee for the future.

'In view of the repeated declarations made to me,' writes Hintze, 'e.g. "it is impossible to predict what the troops will do—their attitude is doubtful, etc.", I proposed that in any case negotiations should be set on foot for the Kaiser's journey to Holland. Such negotiations would take time and all preparations necessary for the Emperor's reception in Holland would have to be made beforehand in case a sudden departure should become necessary.'

This is an interesting point. It will be remembered that at the end of the conference preceding this final meeting with the Emperor, Hindenburg had already instructed Hintze to take the necessary steps to arrange for the journey to Holland.

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*, Berlin, 1922.

Hintze was endeavouring to obtain from the Emperor a decision which had already been taken for him by the Marshal and the Generals.

The Memorandum of 27 July 1919 also states that Hintze pointed out the necessity of immediately taking preparatory measures in the event of a journey to Holland being decided upon. It merely adds that 'von Hintze, the Secretary of State, was instructed by His Majesty to take the necessary steps'.

Hintze is more precise. He writes: 'At this point His Majesty was convulsed with rage. Did I by any chance think that he was incapable of remaining with his troops? I kept silence.' Hintze continues without the least transition, 'upon which His Majesty ordered me to take the steps concerning which I had just spoken to him'.<sup>1</sup> At this, Hintze left to carry out his mission. It was now 5 p.m.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In their joint Memorandum, Gontard and Niemann emphasise the word 'preparatory' by stating that 'His Majesty agreed that His Excellency von Hintze should take the preparatory steps for his reception in Holland should such a course become necessary'. Similarly, the Crown Prince emphasises the fact that no final decision was taken. 'The Emperor had agreed only that the preliminary steps for such a journey should be taken.'

<sup>2</sup> The time of day, which is mentioned by Hintze, coincides exactly with that given in the Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann: 'between 4 and 5 p.m., Hindenburg and Hintze told His Majesty that the situation was growing worse from moment to moment, and begged him to consider the possibility of proceeding to a neutral country as a last resource'. Similarly, the

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Hintze had scarcely left when Admiral von Scheer arrived. He had been since April 1918 Commander in Chief of the German Fleet.<sup>1</sup> He was accompanied by his Chief and Assistant-Chief of Staff, Captains von Levetzow and von Restorff. Although quartered at Spa, these persons had hitherto played no part during 9 November in the various conferences with the Emperor, and had not seen him during that day. Towards 4.30 p.m., Levetzow, who was in his quarters at Spa, had been informed by telephonic communication from the Admiralty in Berlin that the Emperor's abdication had been generally proclaimed. Greatly surprised, he called up the Imperial aide-de-camp on duty. Hindenburg,

time given corresponds to that which can be implied from the account of Levetzow, who, as will be seen later (pp. 143-144), visited the Emperor in company with Admiral von Scheer, after having, about 4 p.m., received a telephone call from Berlin, having had an interview with his Chief and a telephone conversation with one of William's aides-de-camp. Finally, the time agrees more or less with that given in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919, according to which Hindenburg left the Emperor about 5 o'clock. Between the departure of Hintze and that of Hindenburg there was only an interview with Admiral von Scheer which would appear to have been extremely short.

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of April 1918, Admiral von Scheer had replaced Grand Admiral von Holtzendorff as Head of the *Seekriegsleitung*, which was to the navy what the *Oberste Heeresleitung* was to the army. Magnus von Levetzow, his Chief Assistant, was Chief of the Naval Staff. Admiral von Scheer died on 26 November 1928.

Gröner and Marschall were at the time with the Sovereign.<sup>1</sup>

'Shortly afterwards' Admiral von Scheer and his two assistants proceeded to La Fraineuse and were immediately introduced into the presence of the Emperor. 'The Marshal', writes Levetzow, 'was with the Emperor, and Gröner and Marschall somewhat in the background. When we entered His Majesty said: "Marshal von Hindenburg, please be good enough to repeat to Admiral von Scheer what you have just said to me." Turning towards His Majesty, the Marshal repeated that the army could hold out no longer, that the troops were no longer with His Majesty, that there were no more troops loyal to His Majesty. "Would to God, Sire," he concluded, "it were otherwise!"

'His Majesty replied with sovereign dignity and admirable calm: "If things are really as the Marshal says, I cannot allow myself to be surprised here. There is only one thing for me to do—to abdicate as German Emperor. I remain King of Prussia."'

Restorff is also a witness to the complete *sang-froid* of the Emperor on this occasion. He adds that von Scheer supported Hindenburg by

<sup>1</sup> Levetzow's evidence was published in the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* (April 1924). It is reproduced in Niemann's *Revolution von Oben*.—Admiral von Scheer stated that he had nothing to add to this account. Restorff also published his evidence, which appeared in Niemann's book.

stating that unfortunately it was impossible to rely upon the navy any longer.

On this, William II continued: <sup>1</sup> 'These gentlemen know how I have been served by the Chancellor. Unknown to me and without authorisation from me, Prince Max of Baden has this morning proclaimed my abdication both as German Emperor and as King of Prussia. This is the way in which my last Chancellor has used me.'

Admiral von Scheer expressed his regret at the situation of the navy if it were to be deprived of its Supreme Head. William II replied: 'I have no longer a navy.'<sup>2</sup> On which he left the room, after shaking hands with all present.

He also said to von Scheer: 'Admiral, the navy has let me down completely.'<sup>3</sup> His resentment against the navy was deep and perhaps natural. When he heard of the disturbances at Kiel he said to Restorff on 2 November: 'I cannot understand how the navy, in which I have always taken such an interest, could so treacherously betray me. What a disappointment! The navy owed everything to me.' Similarly, Restorff mentions the Emperor's deep emotion when on 6 November he kept saying: 'How can the navy be so treacherous and ungrateful, the navy with which I have been so long and so intimately connected?'

Four years later William II was to write: 'What hurt me more deeply than anything else was that

<sup>1</sup> Levetzow.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Restorff.

the revolution began in the Fleet, my pride and my creation.'

After leaving his Admirals and Generals, the Emperor proceeded to the room in which were his aides-de-camp on duty. 'His true feelings', writes the faithful Niemann, 'brought him to us, where he really belonged.' From him the aides-de-camp learned what had happened. Major von Hirschfeld received the following orders: 'I shall remain to-night at the Château. See that there is a supply of arms and ammunition. The Marshal has informed me that we may have to reckon with attacks from the Bolsheviks. All the aides-de-camp must spend to-night at the Château.' Count Nicholas zu Dohna-Schlodien, the famous captain of the German raider *Moewe*, who had been one of the Emperor's aides-de-camp since the spring of 1917, presented himself for audience on return from leave. William II said to him: 'I told Gröner flatly that I would have nothing more to do with him. In spite of all their proposals I shall remain at Spa.'<sup>1</sup> One of the aides-de-camp proposed that a guard of officers should be formed. The Emperor personally gave further instructions for security measures with a view to a prolonged stay at Spa.<sup>2</sup> After interviewing all his aides-de-camp the Emperor

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

retired into his study,<sup>1</sup> and for some time remained invisible to any member of his entourage.

An extremely interesting point in the foregoing is that, neither with the aides-de-camp nor in the presence of the naval officers, was there any question of a departure for Holland. Levetzow says so in so many words. The Memorandum of 27 July 1919 explicitly states that 'the Marshal left the Emperor with no idea of any permanent separation, but in the firm conviction that he would see his Imperial and Royal Majesty again on the following day and receive his definite commands'.

<sup>1</sup> Niemann.

### III

*The Evening of 9 November at Spa—Hintze and Plessen intervene—Talk and Thoughts of Resistance—The Kaiser's final Decision.*

DURING the evening, General von Plessen sought information from the various Sections of G.H.Q. The information he received showed that the situation was desperate.<sup>1</sup> In a private conversation General Baron von Oldershausen, who had been for two years Chief of the Field Railway Service, begged him not to put any obstacles in the way of the Kaiser's departure. Captain von Ilseemann, who had been Orderly Officer attached to the Emperor since 1 August 1918, and had previously been a member of the Operations Bureau of G.H.Q., said to von Plessen that in the Operations Bureau all the officers, with the exception of Captain Wever, who drafted the communiqués,<sup>2</sup> considered it vitally necessary that

<sup>1</sup> According to the Crown Prince's *Memoirs*, von Plessen's personal investigations were such as to allow him to deny formally the assertions of General Gröner, who had maintained that the troops at G.H.Q. were no longer sound and could not be relied upon to protect the Emperor's person in any event. In the short memorandum which he published in the spring of 1919, von Plessen gave the information contained above, the general sense of which is contrary to that of the Crown Prince's narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Wever had drafted the communiqués since the autumn of 1917.

the Emperor should leave as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup> 'Prussia was dead, and her King alone.'<sup>2</sup> It is more than probable—though there is no textual evidence for it—that von Plessen informed his master of these facts, facts over which William II had an opportunity of thinking when he was alone in his study. Von Plessen, who had always been inclined to resistance, dared not at the moment take the responsibility of advising it.

About 7.30 p.m. he visited Hindenburg and informed him that, 'after the conference of the afternoon, His Majesty had decided to leave for Holland. Von Plessen left the Marshal with considerable emotion. When the Marshal asked whether he could still pay a hurried visit to the Emperor, von Plessen thought it his duty to advise him against it.'<sup>3</sup> His object probably was to avoid overtaxing the Emperor's emotions. On leaving G.H.Q. he met Admiral von Hintze on the staircase, and both of them proceeded to visit the Emperor.

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*, lets it be understood that the pessimism of G.H.Q. was due to the statement of General Gröner, who explained the military situation to his assistants in its darkest aspect.

<sup>2</sup> Schulenburg.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919. The Memorandum drawn up by Plessen, Schulenburg and Marschall, and published on 6 April 1919, said nothing of this visit of von Plessen's to Hindenburg, but the general indications given in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919 are completely confirmed by the very accurate evidence of von Hintze.

Accompanied by Grünau, Hintze had left La Fraineuse after 5 p.m. in order to establish telegraphic and telephonic communication from the Imperial train with the Hague and with Brussels, and to prepare the way for the Emperor's journey to Holland. On the completion of this business about 7 p.m., he proceeded to G.H.Q. 'to announce the preparatory steps I had taken in the event of His Majesty's departure being rendered necessary by circumstances. At G.H.Q. I was informed that the troops there had formed Soldiers' Councils and lost their discipline, that the Rohr battalion had refused to fire on the mutineers,<sup>1</sup> that the Marshal had informed the Emperor that he could no longer be responsible for his safety at G.H.Q., and that General von

<sup>1</sup> This question has been the subject of the most lively discussions. According to Lieut. von Schwerin the Rohr battalion received from G.H.Q. about midday an order not to use fire-arms except in the event of a direct attack against the person of the Emperor. In all other circumstances they were not to use their arms against Germans. Lieut. von Schwerin represented to his superior officer that such an order was likely to compromise the discipline of the battalion, and he took the view that in such circumstances it was no longer possible to guarantee the maintenance of order. Rohr himself said the same thing about 3 p.m. to Major von Münchhausen, Second in Command of Imperial Headquarters. Münchhausen promised to get the order rescinded, but at 9 p.m. stated that he had had no success and that he was utterly in despair and was leaving the army. In this way Schwerin explains the origin of the rumours which were current at Spa, according to which Major Rohr refused to be responsible for the discipline of his battalion.

Plessen had been to interview the Marshal on the subject in a state of complete despair. 'This news seemed to me to reveal the general situation of the Emperor in a new light. I therefore decided to ask His Majesty for orders.'

Niemann denounces as 'false, or in any case greatly exaggerated' the information which Hintze had thus received from G.H.Q., and sees in it an indication of the morbid spirit prevalent in the High Command.<sup>1</sup> A later chapter will show<sup>2</sup> what exactly was the situation of the troops at Spa.

Hintze was received by the Emperor at the same time as von Plessen. 'Without preamble the General began to inform the Emperor of the preparations made for his departure, Imperial train, motor-cars, etc. . . . I concluded that His Majesty had already decided to leave for Holland and I reported the negotiations I had had on the subject with the Hague, both directly and indirectly *via* Brussels.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since Hintze states that he had said nothing on the subject to the Kaiser, the information in question had not had the effect that Niemann imagined. On the possibility of a misunderstanding as regards the Rohr battalion (see the preceding note—what Hintze was told as regards the rebellious spirit of the troops at Spa seems exact), cf. Chapter IV, pp. 232–235. He was told that a Soldiers' Council had been formed. It is certain that such a Council was formed 'during the night'. This news from G.H.Q. makes no difference to the actual time of the events in question; in November, 7 p.m. may be considered as being 'the night', and Hintze did not reach G.H.Q. until after 7 p.m.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter IV, pp. 232–235.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hintze.

## THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT SPA

If the Court Marshal and Major Niemann may be believed, Hintze's part in this matter was by no means so secondary as he states. According to them the Admiral urged the necessity of a speedy decision. 'The possibility alluded to by the Marshal that His Majesty might be kidnapped by his own troops was increasingly imminent. His Majesty yielded to the importunity of von Hintze.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.—So far as facts are concerned, there is no great importance in the contradiction between von Hintze and the Memorandum. The Memorandum merely makes Hintze say what the Admiral, according to his own evidence, had intended to say to the Emperor, and what he had been glad not to have to say, because he thought that the Emperor had already taken a decision. But the contradiction between von Hintze and the Niemann-Gontard Memorandum is extremely interesting from the psychological point of view. It shows how the Emperor's entourage did their utmost to throw on certain of his advisers the responsibility for his departure. It seems fairly certain that about 7 p.m. von Plessen announced to Hindenburg that the Emperor was going. Nevertheless, according to Niemann and Gontard, the Emperor's departure was decided only after Hintze's urgent intervention. But Hintze's visit to the Emperor was later than Plessen's interview with Hindenburg. Hintze's evidence is so precise that it is difficult to throw doubt upon it. Nevertheless, according to Niemann (*Revolution von Oben*), Plessen did not visit Hindenburg to communicate to him the Emperor's decision until after he had seen the Emperor together with Hintze. Although improbable, this is not after all of importance. Plessen continued to run to and fro between La Fraineuse and G.H.Q. It is perfectly possible that he saw Hindenburg several times, although only one visit is mentioned in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

The Emperor had already decided to leave La Fraineuse and take up his residence in his special train.<sup>1</sup> When he reached the train, about 7.40 p.m., he told Hirschfeld and Ilseman, the officers on duty who accompanied him, that after calm reflexion he had decided to 'remain with the army and fight it out to a finish'.<sup>2</sup> In the motor-car which conveyed him to the train he said to them: 'Plessen and Hintze have just put a pistol to my head. I was to leave this evening for the Netherlands. In the heat of the moment I agreed, but I cannot really agree with such a decision. What am I doing? I am causing it to be known that I am remaining with the army as King of Prussia, I am calling troops round me, and before they arrive I am leaving for a destination abroad. What would happen if in spite of all they remained loyal to me and fought for me? Even if only a few men remain loyal, I will fight with them to the end, and if we are all killed, well, I am not afraid of death. I should be deserting my wife and children. No, it is impossible! I am staying here.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to information collected later by the Crown Prince, the Emperor reached this decision during the evening after an interview with Plessen and Grünau. According to Schulenburg, he took the decision during the conference about 4 p.m. with Hindenburg, the Generals and von Hintze.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann. The Emperor's reflexion cannot have been of long duration if he announced his new decision at 7.40, since about 7.30 he had decided to leave for Holland.

<sup>3</sup> Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*.

The same scene took place on several occasions. The natural revolt of his despairing pride inspired William II with words or attempts at resistance, with last-minute hesitations, and with temporary recrudescences of hope.<sup>1</sup> When he arrived at the Imperial train he was informed of a telephonic conversation between Count Platen and Prince Eitel Fritz. Despite recent events, the Empress was in good spirits and sent her best wishes to the Emperor. 'My wife is staying in Germany and they wish to make me go to Holland. No, such an action would be that of a master who abandoned his sinking ship.'<sup>2</sup>

William told the Court Marshal that he would not follow the advice of G.H.Q. to leave the army and the country. He preferred to remain to the end with the army and to risk his own life. The idea of making him desert the army was scandalous. 'It would be tantamount to cowardice.' He expressed the same views in the presence of Plessen and Marschall.<sup>3</sup>

Were these words sincere? After a quarter of an hour's conversation with the Emperor, Marschall and Plessen stated that the order given for the departure to Holland remained in force.<sup>4</sup> But 'at 8.30 p.m., when we were sitting down to

<sup>1</sup> According to Ludwig (*Wilhelm der Zweite*), his whole entourage knew that William II was going to run away. 'But decorum was preserved.'

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Prince August Wilhelm.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.

<sup>4</sup> Second Memorandum of Schulenburg.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

dinner, the whole idea of leaving the country seemed to have been definitely abandoned'.<sup>1</sup> Plessen, with a revival of hope, advised the Emperor to remain with the army, and his advice was enthusiastically received. 'The Imperial train was well guarded by the Rohr Battalion. His Majesty could easily have stayed there until the march on Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne was begun with loyal troops.'<sup>2</sup>

About 8 p.m. Captain von Restorff submitted to the Emperor the requests of Admiral von Scheer, von Levetzow and himself to resign from the Imperial navy, 'His Majesty having been compelled to abdicate'. At the moment, the Emperor was in the Imperial train and was on his way to the dining-car. The officers, he said, should remain at their posts and do their best to restore order. "I am staying here too," he said. When I looked enquiringly at His Majesty, he replied, "I am staying here too," and struck the table with his fist. "By all means," I said, "let Your Majesty remain at G.H.Q. If not, all is lost." "I am staying here. I will not go away." After repeating these words in the most energetic tone, His Majesty proceeded to the dining-car.'<sup>3</sup>

During the evening, Niemann learned from von Plessen that the Emperor, who might be leaving

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of von Plessen.

<sup>3</sup> Restorff adds that Count Moltke, who was orderly officer on duty, can confirm this interview.

'to-day', wished to take him with him. Niemann at once packed. He then went to visit his friend Colonel von Tieschowitz, Head of Department at G.H.Q. Colonel Tieschowitz was convinced that the Emperor was about to proceed to Holland. When Niemann arrived at the Imperial train he found everyone at dinner. 'I had been afraid that the excessive emotion of the last few hours might have induced a certain lethargy in the Emperor. Nothing of the sort. His eyes were full of life and energy, his face reflected calm resolution. He said that he would pass the night in the train, but utterly rejected any idea of leaving for Holland.' Dinner was a melancholy function, no one being in the mood for conversation.

Towards 9.30 p.m., Plessen said to Major Rohr and to Lieut. von Schwerin: 'In the Imperial train no one knows whether the Emperor intends to go or to stay.'<sup>1</sup> The final decision was not to be long delayed.

\* \* \*

Hintze had been informed that the Emperor had expressed his determination to remain with the army. From the staff mess,<sup>2</sup> he telephoned about 9 p.m. to Grünau, who was at table with William II.<sup>3</sup> Some definite decision, he said, must

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of von Schwerin.

<sup>2</sup> Nowak.

<sup>3</sup> There are innumerable contradictions in the various accounts of this final incident. According to his own notes, Hintze was called up by Grünau, who told him that the Emperor was not leaving. Grünau states that he was called up by Hintze.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

be taken, 'in view of any change which might be necessary in the preparations already made. If the departure were delayed, the element of surprise in the plan would no longer come into play.'<sup>1</sup> In full agreement with G.H.Q., Hintze strongly advised that the original idea of departure

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919. Although Hintze assisted in the drafting of this Memorandum, it is considerably nearer Grünau's version than that of Hintze. It repeats almost word for word a portion of the Memorandum published on 6 April 1919 by Plessen, Marschall and Schulenburg. In his notes Hintze states that he was called up on the telephone by Grünau, who told him that the Emperor was not leaving; 'I then observed', said Hintze, 'that if the military authorities could no longer guarantee the Emperor's safety at G.H.Q. a delay might easily have the effect of eliminating the factor of surprise, and the Emperor's departure might be hindered by the mutineers among the troops. I do not know whether Grünau reported this observation to His Majesty. I have not heard that he did.' It was about the beginning of 1919 that Hintze sent his notes to the Minister of the Royal Household. He could then no longer have been in ignorance of events, since his telephone call had been the subject of the most impassioned disputes. According to himself, Hintze did not tell Grünau to inform the Emperor of the unfortunate effects which might be entailed by delay in his departure. On the other hand, Grünau states that Hintze begged him 'both personally and on behalf of G.H.Q., which was in full agreement with him, to repeat to the Emperor the urgent advice to abide by his original decision to leave the country'. The Memorandum of 27 July 1919, in the drafting of which Hintze took part, inclines to Grünau's version, and it seems most probable that Grünau's version is substantially correct. In any case it is certain that Grünau considered Hintze's declaration as virtually a message to be reported by him to the Emperor.

should be adhered to. It was impossible to know how events would develop. It was dangerous to wait until it was too late. Moreover, once in Holland, the Emperor would be in a better position to take steps on behalf of the Empress, and to cause her to come to him.<sup>1</sup> An immediate departure was necessary. The situation had got beyond control. From Aix-la-Chapelle and Eupen the revolutionary movement threatened to reach Spa, and insurgent troops were already marching on G.H.Q. The roads to the front had been barricaded by the mutineers.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until after dinner, about 10 p.m., that Grünau made the above communication to the Emperor, who was at that moment leaving the dining-car followed by Plessen and Marschall.<sup>3</sup> He listened calmly to Grünau's statement, which was of some length, and after a moment's reflexion, said: 'Very well. But not before to-morrow morning.'<sup>4</sup> Then, without a single look behind, he went to his private apartment.

In the meantime, Marshal von Hindenburg, who

<sup>1</sup> Grünau's version.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.

<sup>3</sup> Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*.—The Memorandum of 27 July 1919 speaks only of Plessen, but that may be merely because Plessen collaborated in drafting the Memorandum, whereas Marschall was dead.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919. According to Nowak, Grünau's interview with William II was conducted almost in a whisper. The Emperor confined himself to nodding and saying: 'Very well. We will leave to-morrow.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

was worn out by the emotions of the day, had gone early to bed. When G.H.Q. was informed of the final decision of the Emperor the news was kept from him, so that his sleep should not be troubled. 'Without exception his assistants were sure that the departure of the Emperor was in accordance with his own ideas and wishes. Throughout G.H.Q. there was a general atmosphere of calm after storm.'<sup>1</sup>

During the same night the Crown Prince received a letter which informed him of the decisions taken:

'My Boy,

'As the Marshal can no longer guarantee my safety,<sup>2</sup> and can no longer vouch for the troops, I have decided after severe internal struggles to leave the wreck of my army. Berlin is completely lost and in the hands of the Socialists. Two

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*. In the letter which Hindenburg wrote to William II on 28 July 1922, he explicitly says: 'The statement that on the evening of 9 November I pushed for an immediate departure is a mistake which has been referred to without my consent.' The letter in question appeared in the *Deutsche Wochenzeitung für die Niederlande*, and is reproduced as an appendix to Niemann's *Revolution von Oben*.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann offers an apology for the words 'my safety', as a result of which the view had been put forward that the Emperor thought only of his own personal safety. 'The first sentence in the letter does no more than trace the history of the revolutionary crisis as it appeared in the news from G.H.Q. If the Emperor had thought of his own personal safety it would have been ridiculous to delay his departure until the following day.'

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT SPA.

Governments have been set up there, one with Ebert as Chancellor, the other by the Independent Socialists.

'I suggest that you should remain at your post in order to maintain good order among the troops until their departure for Germany.

'Au revoir, if God wills.

'General von Marschall will give you all further details.

'Your stricken father,

'WILLIAM.'<sup>1</sup>

Very early in the morning of 10 November, Admiral von Hintze proceeded to the station in order, according to his own account, to take stock of the situation. 'The Imperial train was no longer there. The officials informed me that it had left before daybreak.' The Emperor had fixed the departure of the train for 5 a.m.<sup>2</sup> At 4.30 a.m., without any signal, the train moved off, accompanied by a section of the Fourth Company of the Rohr Battalion under the orders of Lieutenant Zehner. 'Two red lamps on the last carriage were the only indications to the few

<sup>1</sup> William II's letter has been the subject of various comments. Ludwig holds the view that the Emperor told his son, 'quite simply', that he had decided to go; but he criticises the 'ceremonial stiffness' of the subscription 'your stricken father'.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of Gontard and Niemann.—'Yielding to the unqualified insistence of his most responsible military and civil advisers, His Majesty ordered a departure for the Dutch frontier at 5 a.m. on 10 November.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

persons present that the Emperor was leaving Germany.'<sup>1</sup>

The train came to a stop at a neighbouring station, where the Kaiser left it with a portion of his escort.

At 2 a.m. the Emperor's chauffeur, Warner,<sup>2</sup> had been awakened, and had received orders to prepare for a long journey. He was to leave without the usual flag, and to remove any signs which might cause the Imperial car to be recognised by 'patrols of the revolutionary army'. As a result of this order, about ten motor-cars left Spa, proceeding at a moderate pace through the 'dark, foggy' night. Warner headed the cortège, driving an empty car.

Suddenly, a car coming in the opposite direction gave him a sign to stop, and then on the road he recognised the Emperor, enveloped in an overcoat. William II with three officers took his seat in the car, which started off at once. Another car was placed in front and two others followed.

They reached the Dutch frontier at 7.10 a.m. It was just daybreak, and Sunday morning.

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of von Schwerin.

<sup>2</sup> Warner's *Memoirs* have also been published.

CHAPTER III  
THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN





# I

*Decisions of the Social Democrats and the Chancellor—Prince Max publishes the News of Abdication—Ebert as Chancellor.*

WITHOUT entering into the details of the Revolution in Berlin, a history dealing with the Kaiser's abdication should briefly explain the course of events in Berlin on 9 November, which snatched from William II the power which he refused to abdicate.

'Everything depends on Berlin and the Social Democrats,' wrote Haussmann on 8 November. 'On their decision it depends whether the workers remain in the factories or come out into the streets.' The Imperial Capital was, as it were, encircled by a ring of fire. After the ports—Kiel, Lübeck, Bremen, and Hamburg—after the North-West—Hanover, Brunswick and Cologne—after Munich, the flame spread on 8 November to Düsseldorf, Frankfort-on-Main, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Halle and Magdeburg.

On the same day about noon, the Main Committee of the Reichstag met to discuss the situation. Despite the aged Groeber, the Centre pronounced in favour of abdication, since the Social Democrats thought that, if it were not proclaimed, the flood of revolution could no longer be held in check. The National Liberals took the same

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

view. The Conservative Party alone reaffirmed its 'loyalty to the Wearer of the Crown'. An overwhelming majority of the deputies held, with Gothein, that 'to retire voluntarily would be the greatest service the Emperor could render to the State'.

Ebert announced that he would tell his friends: 'Until the Armistice is concluded we are agreed that neither the Chancellor nor ourselves should take any definite action.' He re-stated the formula which had been used the day before by Scheidemann to his colleagues in the Ministry, and the Party issued a manifesto prolonging until the Armistice the time-limit fixed for its ultimatum. 'The German delegation can only this morning have arrived at enemy headquarters. Our withdrawal from the Government would compromise the possibility of concluding an armistice. We have prolonged our original time-limit for a few hours, so that the first consideration may be the cessation of bloodshed.'

In the evening, however, the Executive Committee of the Party was informed by its accredited agents in the great manufacturing undertakings of the Capital, that delay was no longer possible. The Independents and the Spartacists had mobilised their forces for the morrow and were proclaiming a general strike. In these circumstances the Social Democrats decided to leave the Government and rally to the general strike if abdication had not been announced by the follow-

ing morning. 'I was firmly convinced', wrote Scheidemann, 'that once the stone had started rolling, its career could not be stopped. . . . The workers, and above all those in the large-scale undertakings, were underfed and a prey to nervous excitement. There was no calming them. . . . It would have needed a miracle to prevent manifestations on the morrow by the workers of Berlin.'

Helfferich met Scheidemann by chance that evening. 'If only the Emperor would abdicate to-day!' cried the Socialist leader. 'If not, I cannot be responsible for the consequences.' 'Suppose he does abdicate; what guarantee can you give then?' asked Helfferich. Scheidemann replied with a shrug of the shoulders.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the morning of 9 November, Scheidemann put through a call to Wahnschaffe, Under-Secretary of State at the Chancellery, to ask whether the Emperor had yet abdicated. Wahnschaffe replied that the news of his abdication was expected at any moment. Scheidemann said that he would wait another hour. 'If the Other One does not go, I shall go,' he said. At 9 o'clock, he rang the Chancellery again, was informed that there was still no news and was asked to wait until midday. 'I must ask you', he said, 'to announce my resignation to the Chancellor. I will forward it at once in writing. . . . You tell me that I should not precipitate matters. I

<sup>1</sup> Helfferich: *Der Weltkrieg*, Berlin, 1919.

tell you you should not delay until it is too late.'<sup>1</sup>

The Chancellery soon became aware of the fact that since 9 o'clock processions of workers were on the march from all districts. 'The revolution had begun punctually.'<sup>2</sup> From 10 o'clock onwards news began to pour in detailing the progress of the movement. After an early telephonic conversation with von Hintze at Spa, Wahnschaffe made haste to tell Ebert that abdication was as good as settled, and asked him to suspend the manifestations. Ebert went off to see what could be done, but held out small hopes of the possibility of stopping the disturbances. The streets filled with demonstrators. The workers had stopped work, and some of the troops were fraternising with them.

Von Payer recounts the agitation which prevailed that morning at the Chancellery. At one time, what looked like a Cabinet meeting would be in progress; at another, isolated groups would be found in discussion. 'There was a perpetual coming and going, and people kept drifting in.'

<sup>1</sup> Scheidemann's letter ran as follows: 'Berlin, 9 November 1918. To the Chancellor. Sir, I have the honour to inform your Grand-Ducal Highness that I resign my post as Secretary of State. I have the honour to be, etc. (sgd.) Scheidemann.'—Conrad Haussmann, who was also Secretary of State, writes that he was told about 9 o'clock of the resignation of his Socialist colleague (*Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 November 1920). Prince Max states that he was not informed of it until 11 o'clock.

<sup>2</sup> Von Payer, *op. cit.*

At 10.30, von Payer discussed the situation with his fellow Wurtemberger, Haussmann, the Secretary of State, who summarised their joint opinion as follows:

'If the Emperor abdicates, Prince Max must remain. The Social Democrats should get another seat in the Cabinet; the Independents might be offered an Under-Secretaryship. If the Emperor does not abdicate, the Cabinet should resign and declare that it cannot assume the direction of affairs, as the result of the decisions of the Sovereign. In that case, the Kaiser would probably abdicate and, in this event, it would be desirable for Prince Max to remain Chancellor. If the Emperor even then refused to abdicate, there would be only one way to save the Reich from the Berlin revolution, starvation and Bolshevism—the Cabinet should assume dictatorial powers.'

And still the expected announcement of abdication, so eagerly awaited at the Chancellery, did not come from Spa. Prince Max was convinced that the revolutionary movement was irresistible. But he still hoped to be in a position to canalise it 'in legitimate channels', provided that the Kaiser's abdication was announced, the Chancellorship given to the Socialist Ebert, and the whole nation invited to elect a Constituent Assembly. In this way he had a 'faint hope' of saving the monarchy. 'Abdication was the only method of avoiding complete ruin.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

The telephonic conversations between the Chancellery and Spa had left the Prince with the firm conviction that abdication had been virtually decided and that all that remained was to find a formula for it.<sup>1</sup> He was aware that he was not formally entitled to publish the news of abdication without the Emperor's consent. But he thought it his duty to publish as an official decision a resolution which he believed was already agreed, and to publish it 'at the moment when its publication would have the best effect'. Nevertheless, although abdication seemed now to be a question of minutes, he hesitated, 'in view of the onus of responsibility involved'.

Simons advised him urgently to take action for the preservation of the monarchy. It was possible that the revolution might be stopped at the last moment by the sudden knowledge that abdication was an accomplished fact. Simons himself said: 'For me the point at issue was whether the Government could be handed over peaceably to Ebert or whether it would pass into the hands of the Spartacists after a bloody revolution in the Moscow manner. . . . I knew that Ebert was not in principle an opponent of monarchy. I

<sup>1</sup> As witnesses of the moral certainty in the Chancellor's immediate entourage as to the decision which was thought to have been already taken at Spa, Wahnschaffe appeals to all the high officials in Berlin who were directly concerned:—Solf, the Foreign Minister, Walter Simons, Counsellors Heilbronn, von Prittwitz, Riesler, von Bornstedt, etc.

## THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

advised the Prince to stretch every point possible in order to publish the news of abdication in time. . . .'

After consulting the Ministry of Justice, Simons drafted a message announcing the Kaiser's abdication. He then proceeded to the Ministry of the Interior, to discuss the question of a regency from the legal point of view. Without waiting for his return, Prince Max communicated Simons' draft announcement to the Wolff Bureau at 11.30 a.m. The Prince was fully aware of the responsibility he was taking upon himself. He had acted because the Kaiser had failed to act. The Imperial reply was slow in coming, he had anticipated it because he saw no other means of helping to save the monarchy. Nevertheless, his hope was illusory. It was now too late to do anything for the dynasty.

Apart from Simons, the Prince consulted no one of his colleagues. The Minister of War read the news in the papers and had no suspicion but that it had been duly and regularly announced from Spa. Wahnschaffe and Prittwitz themselves did not hear the news until 2 p.m., at the very moment when Admiral von Hintze was telephoning from Spa. Thus, while Wahnschaffe was telephoning to Spa and urging abdication more insistently than ever, abdication had been since 11.30 an accomplished fact, thanks to the decision of the Chancellor.

The proclamation communicated to the Wolff



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

agency by the Chancellor, and, through Wolff, to the world, ran as follows:

'9 *November*.—The Kaiser and King has decided to renounce the throne. The Chancellor remains in office until the questions connected with the abdication of the Kaiser, the renunciation of the Crown Prince of the German Empire and of Prussia, and the setting-up of the Regency have been regulated. He intends to propose to the Regent the appointment of Herr Ebert to the Chancellorship, and the bringing in of a Bill to enact that election writs be immediately issued for a German Constituent National Assembly. This would have to settle finally the future Constitution of the German people, including any sections of it that might wish to be included within the Empire.

(Signed) MAX, PRINCE OF BADEN,  
'Imperial Chancellor.'

It was not until several weeks later that William II and the Crown Prince themselves gave due sanction to this proclamation, the former by abdicating as Emperor and King of Prussia, the latter by renouncing his rights to the Imperial and Royal Crowns.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following is the text of these Acts, as published by the Wolff Bureau:

(1) In order to dissipate certain misunderstandings which have arisen on the subject of his abdication, the Emperor William II has, by an irremediable constitutional act, renounced his rights

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

Prince Max's proclamation was cried by the newsvendors in the streets of Berlin from midday onwards. Payer expressed the philosophic view that if it had succeeded in gaining time, the Monarchy could not complain. But the proclamation came too late to secure a throne for William II's grandson.

\* \* \*

to the throne of Prussia and to the rights therein implicit to the Imperial German Crown. The document in question is as follows:

'By these presents, I renounce for ever my rights to the throne of Prussia and the rights therein implicit to the Imperial German Crown. At the same time, I release all the officials of the German Empire and of Prussia, as also all the officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Prussian navy and army, and of the contingents of the Confederate States, from the oath of allegiance which they took to me as their Emperor, King and Supreme War Lord.

'Pending the reorganisation of the German Empire, I expect them to assist the *de facto* rulers of Germany to protect the German people from the imminent dangers of anarchy, starvation and foreign domination.

'Done and signed by my own hand, with the Imperial seal.

'WILLIAM.

'AMERONGEN, 28 November 1918.'

\* \* \*

(2) 'By these presents, I formally and definitely renounce all rights to the throne of Prussia and to the Imperial German Crown of which I might stand possessed, whether as a result of the abdication of His Majesty the Emperor, or by any other legal means.

'WILLIAM.

'WEIRINGEN, 1 December 1918.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

About midday<sup>1</sup> the Social Democratic delegates arrived at the Chancellery—Ebert and Scheidemann, accompanied by Otto Braun, Gustav Heller and Fritz Brolat. The Chancellor received them in the library. With him were von Payer, the Vice-Chancellor, Solf, the Foreign Minister, Haussmann, Count Røedern, Secretary of State for Finance, and von Bernstorff, who had just been recalled from Constantinople for the purpose of conducting negotiations with the United States. A little later came Simons, and Scheuch, the Minister for War.

‘With quiet lucidity<sup>2</sup> Ebert stated that, in order to prevent bloodshed, the Social Democratic Party thought it necessary that the Government should be handed over to men who enjoyed the full confidence of the people.’<sup>3</sup> In this demand the

<sup>1</sup> Haussmann says it was 12 o’clock. Payer says, a little after midday.

<sup>2</sup> These are the words used by Payer. Similarly, Haussmann remarks on ‘the absolutely quiet and pleasant tones’ in which Ebert put forward a decision which was, none the less, inevitable.

<sup>3</sup> Thus Payer’s account.—In connection with this account, which agrees completely with the Memoirs of Prince Max, with Haussmann’s article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 21 November 1920, and with the information contained in a letter from Solf to Otto Hammann (*Bilder aus der Letzten Kaiserzeit*, Berlin 1922), *Vorwärts* of 5 January 1922 maintained that Ebert and his friends proceeded to the Chancellery not to demand power, but to obtain news of the situation; it was Prince Max himself, said *Vorwärts*, who proposed that Ebert should be Chancellor. So also Conrad Hänisch maintains that Ebert was invited to become Chancellor (*Friedrich Ebert, Kämpfe und Ziele*, Dresden,

Independent Socialists were in full agreement with the Social Democratic majority. Ebert did not yet know whether the Independents would be willing to enter the new Government, though he hoped they would. But he would not reject the co-operation of representatives of the bourgeois Parties.

Prince Max asked Ebert whether he would or could guarantee the maintenance of order. Scheidemann replied that all the troops in Berlin had gone over to the Socialists. On Haussmann demanding proof of this, Scheidemann proposed that he should satisfy himself by going the round of the barracks in a motor-car, accompanied by a Socialist leader.

The Chancellor reminded his hearers that he had proposed the convocation of a National Constituent Assembly to decide on the future Constitution of Germany. Ebert expressed his agreement with the proposal. It is a question whether he stated that he would himself take the Chancellorship. Payer does not remember. Payer asked Ebert whether it was the intention of the new Government to exercise its functions within the general framework of the Reich. Ebert replied in the affirmative.

1927). Finally, Pastor Felden, who was a great friend and admirer of the first President of the German Republic, asserts that in the forenoon of 9 November, at a secret interview, Prince Max begged Ebert to take the Chancellorship (*Eines Menschen Weg*, Bremen, 1927).

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Prince Max stated that he and his Cabinet would consider the question raised by the Social Democrats. He then withdrew for about a quarter of an hour to his own room, with some of those present. But there was no proper Cabinet meeting and next to no discussion. 'Discussion was useless; in actual fact the power already rested with Ebert.'<sup>1</sup> Resistance seemed out of the question. Max of Baden notes that no one raised any objection when he proposed to hand over his office to Ebert.<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that he had offered his resignation two days earlier, and that the attitude of the troops made it impossible for the Government any longer to maintain its authority.<sup>3</sup>

The Prince and his colleagues then returned to Ebert and his friends. He asked Ebert whether he was willing to assume the post of Chancellor.<sup>4</sup> 'It is a heavy task, but I will undertake it,' was the answer. Solf then asked, 'Are you prepared to carry on the Government in accordance with the Constitution?' 'Yes,' said Ebert. 'Even with the Monarchy?' persisted Solf. 'Yesterday', replied Ebert, 'I could have given an unconditional affirmative to this ques-

<sup>1</sup> Payer, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> According to Nowak, it was Solf, the Foreign Minister, who first made the proposal.

<sup>3</sup> Haussmann, article in the *Tageblatt*, 21 November 1920.

<sup>4</sup> Payer does not remember whether Prince Max made any statement to Ebert. The account given above follows the account given by Prince Max in his *Memoirs*.

tion; to-day I must consult my friends.' Prince Max endeavoured to press the point: 'We must now solve the question of the Regency.' 'It is too late for that,' said Ebert; and behind him his Party delegates repeated in chorus: 'Too late, too late!' The Monarchy's day was done.

Thus began the new régime. Ebert was already addressed as 'Chancellor', and acted as such. He at once issued an appeal in which he stated that Max of Baden had handed over to him the government of the Reich, and, through the ready pen of Conrad Hänsch, he urged calm on the people, in a manifesto signed 'Ebert, Chancellor'. Payer mentions the somewhat lengthy discussions, among various groups of those present, concerning the Ministry of War, the Military Governorship of Berlin, the attitude of the troops, and the convocation of a National Constituent Assembly.

Ebert then sent for representatives of the extreme Left. Three Independents, Oscar Cohn, Dittmann and Vogtherr, arrived at the Chancellery 'with an air of considerable embarrassment'.<sup>1</sup> With them Ebert went into an adjoining room. At his request he was accompanied by Payer and Solf. The brusque tone of the interview is to be attributed to the fact that two old antagonists, mortal enemies, were brought face to face. 'In an imperious tone' Ebert told the Independents that the Social Democrats had decided to take over the government. As Chancellor, he wished

<sup>1</sup> Von Payer.

to ask them whether they were ready to co-operate in the government and to agree to the co-operation of other Parties. The Independents, 'who showed no great signs of confidence', said that they would consult their friends. After giving them a somewhat restricted time-limit for an answer, Ebert went off to lunch at the Reichstag, where the deputies of his Party were assembled.

Scheidemann, however, had forestalled him. A vast crowd of workers and soldiers had gathered in the Parliament Square, and he had addressed them from a window of the Reichstag Building. 'Comrades,' he said, 'the Monarchy has fallen. The majority of the garrison has joined us. The Hohenzollerns have abdicated. Long live the great German Republic! Fritz Ebert is forming a new Government from all the Socialist groups. Our duty is not to let the people's victory be sullied. See you to it that our security is guaranteed and the Republic made safe from any disorder! Long live the free German Republic!' It was about 2 o'clock that Scheidemann, amid the frantic applause of the mob, thus placed himself at the head of the Revolution and proclaimed the Republic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A year later Conrad Haussmann was talking over past events with his former colleague, Scheidemann. Scheidemann confirmed the fact that on 9 November 1918 he had proclaimed the Republic, between 1 and 2 o'clock, after Max of Baden had handed over the government to Ebert, and after the latter had left the Chancellery on his way to the Reichstag. Haussmann attached the utmost importance to this cardinal question

## THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

Scheidemann thus played the part of *deus ex machina*. Ebert was surprised and indignant. Red with anger he struck the table, and cried out to Scheidemann: 'You had no right to proclaim the Republic!'<sup>1</sup> But Scheidemann had shown insight in divining the prevailing currents of public opinion. Already, from the offices of *Vorwärts* a Council of Workers and Soldiers had issued a proclamation headed 'Long live the Socialist Republic'.<sup>2</sup> And about 4 o'clock Karl Liebknecht, who had on 21 October left the prison where he had been confined since 1916, waved the red flag from the historic balcony of the Schloss, from which Frederick William IV had bowed humbly to his people in 1848, and from which, in August 1914, William II had promised his soldiers that they should all return to their homes 'before the leaves fall from the trees'.

The Empire was bankrupt and disappeared at a single blow. Incapable of maintaining itself, it made no attempt at resistance. The cases of

of time. For David had told him that the incident took place between 10 and 11 o'clock. 'In that case, Scheidemann and Ebert would have been guilty of the basest form of deceit in their relations with the Prince and with us.' Haussmann notes this conversation in his private diary, under date of 21 October 1919.

<sup>1</sup> Philipp Scheidemann: *Memoirs of a Social Democrat*, London, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Müller: *Die November Revolution*, Vienna, 1925.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

street-shooting, which took place here and there, and caused one or two deaths, particularly in the neighbourhood of the Schloss, are attributable solely to misunderstanding of the true situation.

From 1.15 p.m. onwards, processions of workers had been filing past the Chancellery. At 1.30 p.m., the first red flag was seen in the Wilhelmstrasse; it was on a motor lorry on which were about ten soldiers, one civilian and a machine-gun. It was greeted with prolonged cheering. After this, many cars passed decorated with red flags.<sup>1</sup>

Payer got on the telephone to Spa, and personally explained what had happened. He spoke with General von Plessen, and then with General Gröner. 'It was a thankless task,' he said. 'I got the impression, which is confirmed by our own experiences, that at Spa no one was prepared for such news. They were taken completely by surprise.' Payer himself does not seem to have been altogether aware of the true situation, so quickly were events moving. He told Helfferich, whom he saw in the afternoon, that no change was intended in the monarchical Constitution; a regent would be appointed, and there would be a Cabinet of Social Democrats, with perhaps an admixture of Independents, though the latter were opposed to co-operation with the bourgeois Parties.<sup>2</sup>

Prince Max had now lost all his illusions. His

<sup>1</sup> Haussmann, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Helfferich, *op. cit.*

one desire was to leave Berlin. His object was to meet his wife at Aschersleben in Prussian Saxony, and return to Baden, picking up on the way his brothers-in-law,<sup>1</sup> and the Duke and Duchess of Brunswick, son-in-law and daughter respectively of the Emperor who for the last few minutes had been denouncing him as a traitor. Between 5 and 6 o'clock, he went to take leave of Ebert. He states in his *Memoirs* that Ebert pressed him to remain, to become 'Lieutenant-General of the Reich'.<sup>2</sup> But he refused. He was unwilling to co-operate with the Independents, who were to join the new Government. At the last, he adjured his successor to do his utmost for the Reich. 'I have already given it two sons,' was Ebert's simple answer.

The following morning Ebert ceased to be Chancellor and the two Socialist Parties formed a Provisional Council of six People's Commissioners, all Socialists—three Majority Socialists, Ebert, Scheidemann and Landsberg; and three Independents, Haase, Dittman and Barth.

<sup>1</sup> Haussmann, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> This proposal of Ebert's, which was unknown until 1927, came as a great surprise to the Socialists. Though he does not question it, Hermann Müller sees in it no more than an act of 'excessive courtesy' on Ebert's part. (Article in the *Review, Gesellschaft*, 1927, IX.) Max of Baden died on 6 November 1929.

## II

*Telephonic Conversations between Spa and Berlin—Hintze's Communication—Conversations between Hintze and Wahnschaffe, and Simons and Prince Max.*

THROUGHOUT the morning of 9 November, the Chancellery, in despair, poured out telephone message after telephone message. Its despairing calls were the means of informing the Emperor's entourage of the disorderly events in the Capital and of increasing the despondency which weighed on Spa. They confirmed the pessimistic views of General Gröner. This was admitted even by the Crown Prince.

At the Chancellery, Wahnschaffe, Under-Secretary of State, spent almost the whole morning on the telephone. He spoke not only with Hintze but with Grünau, Hirschfeld and Schulenburg. From time to time his place was taken by Prittwitz or Simons, who spoke with Grünau, Hirschfeld and General Gröner. Hintze has since poured forth the vials of his indignation on the wretched Wahnschaffe. 'The telephone was consistently occupied by Herr von Wahnschaffe, who incessantly urged abdication. . . . "In the name of the Imperial Government," he reiterated his haughty insistence. "His Majesty must abdicate. . . ." On more than one occasion I protested against his tone.'

When Max of Baden became Chancellor,

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

Arnold Wahnschaffe had returned to the headship of the Chancellery, which he had held under Bethmann Hollweg from 1909 to 1917. On 10 July 1917, in a letter to the all-powerful Chief Quartermaster-General, Ludendorff, Wahnschaffe referred to a saying which was current in Parliamentary circles, and attributed it to Ludendorff: 'If Bethmann Hollweg remains Chancellor we shall lose the war.' In the national interest he urged that Ludendorff should deny the authorship of the statement. Ludendorff did not reply until Bethmann Hollweg had resigned, and then, on 18 July, replied that he did not think it opportune to issue a denial. Wahnschaffe strongly maintained his point in a further letter of 21 July. Ludendorff replied on 27 July with a violence which did not prevent Wahnschaffe from returning to the charge for the third time on 31 July. Finally, Ludendorff complained to Bethmann Hollweg's pious successor, and Michaelis notified Wahnschaffe, who left the Chancellery a few days later, of the 'unwarrantable' tone of his letters.<sup>1</sup>

So too now Hintze denounced the 'unwarrantable' tone of the telephonic messages with which Spa was bombarded on 9 November by the

<sup>1</sup> Schwerdtfeger. In his *Memoirs*, von Michaelis states that he would willingly have collaborated with Wahnschaffe, who was a childhood's friend; but Wahnschaffe was determined to follow Bethmann Hollweg into retirement, having been his chief political colleague.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

impatient though legitimate enthusiasm of the Under-Secretary of State to the Chancellery.

Hintze would have preferred to speak personally with the Chancellor. He several times asked to do so, and was promised that he should; but the Chancellor did not come to the telephone; or rather, he came only after 2.30 p.m., when Spa had been informed of the proclamation published by the Wolff Bureau.

The Chancellor's story is that he tried vainly to get speech with the Emperor. In support of his assertion may be quoted a remark of Major Niemann, according to which an aide-de-camp came to the Emperor and said that Prince Max wished to speak with him on the telephone. The Emperor had just requested Hindenburg and Gröner to supply him with exact information, and was on his way to the garden of La Fraineuse. Niemann's account leaves it to be supposed that William II went into the garden in order to avoid speaking with the Chancellor, and that General Schulenburg was privy to this design. 'The Chancellor would only have harassed the Emperor with a request for abdication. . . . Schulenburg warned the Kaiser against premature decisions. The military authorities in Berlin should be asked whether their information was the same as that of the Chancellor, and nothing should be done until replies were received from the officers at the front convened at Spa.'

Although the Emperor did not speak with his

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

Chancellor on the 9th, at least Spa had telephonic communication that day not only with the Chancellery, but with officials of the Ministry of War and of the Foreign Office. The officials at Spa spent the whole morning on the telephone, and it is really impossible to accept Ludwig's criticisms that 'the imperial instrument declined to receive the tidings of that Ninth of November'.<sup>1</sup> Never had the telephone been so incessantly in use.

Hintze and Grünau succeeded one another at the telephone in the room assigned to the aide-de-camp on duty, where, during a part of the conversation, were the two aides-de-camp (Major von Hirschfeld and Captain von Ilseemann), von Gontard, the Court Marshal, and General von Marschall. When any sensational news was announced, Hintze ran into the garden to keep the Emperor informed of events.

\* \* \*

The conversation of 9 November between Berlin and Spa would seem to have begun about 9 o'clock in the morning with a message the importance of which was decisive. There is still a certain mystery about it.

In his *Memoirs*, Max of Baden refers to a statement made at 9.15 a.m. by von Hintze, who called up the Chancellery from G.H.Q. 'The Supreme Command had resolved to report to His Majesty at once that in the event of civil

<sup>1</sup> Emil Ludwig, *Wilhelm der Zweite*, Berlin, 1926.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

war the Kaiser would not be able to reckon on the support of the armed forces, and that, in view of the difficulty of provisioning it, the Army would not be in a position to carry on such a civil war. Wahnschaffe's remark, "in these circumstances there is no alternative left to the Kaiser but abdication", went uncontradicted.'

This account of Prince Max is in complete agreement with the statement published by Wahnschaffe himself. 'About 9 a.m. Hintze made me a most serious communication from G.H.Q. G.H.Q. was now convinced that the troops at the front would no longer follow His Majesty for the purpose of putting down the troubles in Germany. The Marshal and the Chief Quartermaster-General had determined so to inform the Emperor. Hintze and Grünau were about to proceed to the Marshal for a preliminary discussion of the conference which would be immediately necessary with His Majesty. I at once said over the telephone that in such circumstances I saw no further means of avoiding abdication. I was not contradicted.'

Hintze, who is clearly anxious to avoid any personal responsibility, gives a very different account in his *Notes*, which were written before the publication of Wahnschaffe's and Prince Max's observations.

'In the morning I was called to the telephone. There was a message from the Chancellery for

THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

transmission to His Majesty. At my request, von Grünau immediately took notes on the spot of the communication, which was as follows:

'At 9 o'clock a general strike broke out. No confidence can be placed in the troops. Even the new troops are unwilling to obey orders.

'The Socialist Secretaries of State, Under-Secretaries of State and Ministers have left the Government.

'Scheidemann, Ebert and others have stated that they think it possible to maintain peace and order if the Social Democrats assume a predominant position in the Government. They wish to come to terms with the Government. They are opposed to Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, and wish to carry on the Government and give seats in the Ministry, as circumstances may dictate, to the Independents and also to representatives of other Parties. It is impossible to risk a battle.'

It is of little importance whether Admiral von Hintze telephoned on his own account, or was called to the telephone although he had not asked to be put through to Berlin. This is a mere detail. The essential point is that Hintze makes no mention of his 'extremely serious' statement, of which Wahnschaffe and the Chancellor speak, namely, the decision taken by G.H.Q. to inform the Emperor that the troops would not follow



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

him in the event of civil war. 'In common with all of us,' writes Wahnschaffe, 'the Chancellor thought that, after Hintze's communication on the subject of the attitude of the troops at the front, the question of abdication, which had been continually suggested by telephone and telegram throughout the previous days, would be taken into serious consideration in the conference with His Majesty.'

In his *Memoirs*, von Payer also mentioned the important information received from Spa by the Chancellery. He confines himself to saying that it came from G.H.Q., but does not mention Hintze. Be that as it may, the communication in question was made without the knowledge of the Emperor or of his most intimate advisers, in particular, General von Plessen. During the following five hours the people at Spa were discussing the question whether or no the army would remain loyal to the Emperor, whereas the Chancellery, on Hintze's information, believed that this question had already been settled in the negative.<sup>1</sup>

A further perusal of Hintze's *Notes* throws into yet stronger relief the contradictions between his own narrative and the testimony of the officials at the Chancellery. The point at issue was clearly the desire to throw on someone else the responsibility for abdication.

When the message from Berlin had been trans-

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*.

cribed, Hintze asked with whom he was speaking. 'When I had repeated the question more than once, a voice from Berlin replied that Wahnschaffe, the Under-Secretary of State and Head of the Chancellery, was at the other end of the wire.' Hintze summarises his conversation with Wahnschaffe in the phrase, 'The streets of Berlin are running with blood.' Wahnschaffe declared that that he had used no such language. 'All those present in the room from which I was telephoning to Spa', he says, 'declared that neither Simons nor myself made use of any such expression. Grünau, who was sharing with Hintze the work of telephonic communication between Spa and the Chancellery, knew nothing of any such ridiculous exaggeration.' Although the Chancellery had not, in all probability, transmitted any such alarming formula to Spa, it must be admitted that it could hardly announce any news that was not alarming.

According to Hintze, Wahnschaffe's statement was as follows: 'The streets of Berlin are running with blood. The Spandau Artillery, which was called in, has gone over to the insurgents, together with the Third Regiment of the Foot Guards, and the Battalions of Jägers, who were regarded as *corps d'élite*. His Majesty should be informed of these facts and advised to abdicate.'

Hintze more than once refused to transmit such news to the Emperor until confirmation had been received from the competent authorities. He

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

asked Wahnschaffe for the sources of his information. 'Herr Wahnschaffe stated that the military authorities had transmitted the news to the Chancellery. I asked, what military authorities? He replied, the Minister of War. I then asked to speak personally with the Minister of War, but he did not come, and I repeated my request in vain.'

Hintze cut off from the Chancellery and vainly tried to put through an urgent call to the Military Governor of Berlin. He then visited the Emperor in order to 'keep him informed of the information transmitted by Herr Wahnschaffe, of the doubts which he had himself raised in connection with this information, and of the attempts which he had made to check the news'. According to Hintze, Hindenburg expressed no opinion on these telephonic communications. But Plessen loudly approved Hintze's criticisms and accompanied him to the telephone box.

'Herr Wahnschaffe had already rung up again,' notes the implacable von Hintze. Wahnschaffe, on the other hand, complains bitterly of delay in securing communication with Hintze and Grünau. Prince Max writes: 'I shall never forget the agony of this senseless, inexplicable wait that followed.' Wahnschaffe had rung up again in order to transmit the latest military news, which was worse than ever, and concluded as follows: 'The Chancellor urgently begs His Majesty to abdicate, otherwise all is irrevocably lost. Abdication might still save

the dynasty.' Hintze 'flatly refused' to transmit any such communication to the Emperor, and protested 'energetically' against the form in which it was couched. He asked to be allowed to speak to the Chancellor. 'They promised that I should, but the Chancellor did not come to the telephone. I told His Majesty the full details.'

From Spa, General von Plessen held several conversations with Wahnschaffe, whose place at the telephone was afterwards taken by Scheuch, Minister of War. According to his own statement,<sup>1</sup> General Scheuch reached the Chancellery about noon, when news of the abdication was being cried in the streets. On his way through a room 'chock full of people', he was summoned by Wahnschaffe, who cried out from the telephone: 'Here is the Minister of War. Carry on with the call. General von Plessen is on the telephone.' Plessen asked for particulars of the military situation. 'I told him', says General Scheuch, 'of the attitude of the Fourth Jägers, the Northern Reserve, certain units of the Guard and the Jüterbog Artillery. In reply to further questions from him, I told him that the information came from news brought directly to the Ministry of War and from a detailed communication from the Military Governor of Berlin. The General expressed a wish to hear the Governor's account. I did my utmost to satisfy him, but I was informed later

<sup>1</sup> Letter from General Scheuch to Wahnschaffe, published in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of 12 September 1919.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

that no communication could be established between G.H.Q. and the Governor.' <sup>1</sup>

Hintze was once more with the Emperor when he was recalled to the telephone. On this occasion Wahnschaffe pointed out the futility of resistance and renewed the urgent request of the Government to the Emperor to abdicate. Hintze asked if he could speak with the Minister of War. 'They promised me that I should, but instead of the Minister one of his assistants, Lieut.-Colonel van den Bergh, came to the telephone.' The Minister of War had just spoken with General von Plessen. Van den Bergh, who had already had a conversation with an officer at G.H.Q., told Hintze that the casualties at Berlin amounted to about thirty or forty killed and wounded. Certain troops, the Third Regiment of Foot Guards, the Spandau Artillery and a battalion of Jägers<sup>2</sup> had gone over to the insurgents. The attitude of the garrison of Berlin was uncertain. In reply to questions from Hintze, the Minister's assistant stated that the Military Governor's staff took the same view of the situation.

Van den Bergh then spoke with Plessen. 'General von Plessen was unwilling to believe

<sup>1</sup> General Schulenburg was wrong in stating, in his first Memorandum, that there had been telephonic communication between Spa and the Military Governor of Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> Hintze and Payer speak of the Jägers of Lübben. As a matter of fact, the Jägers in question were those of Naumburg. The Jägers of Lübben were not at Berlin.

THE <sup>7</sup> NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

that the Fourth Jägers had refused to obey orders. He requested me to transmit to the Military Governor of Berlin His Majesty's orders to make an immediate report to His Majesty on the military situation in Berlin.' <sup>1</sup>

It was now about 12.30 p.m. Prince Max had an hour ago forwarded to the Wolff Bureau the note announcing the Kaiser's abdication, and was engaged in handing over his powers as Chancellor to Ebert. But Spa knew nothing of this; no more did Wahnschaffe, who was tied to his telephone.

Van den Bergh's information was welcomed by Hintze, who states that it created a certain atmosphere of hope in the Emperor's entourage. General von Plessen stated more than once that at the very least 'we should wait to see what would happen if the troops fired on the mob'.<sup>2</sup>

Van den Bergh stated that the majority of the troops were mutinying, but pointed out that in the streets of Berlin the fighting was not very serious.<sup>3</sup> It is true that he did not add that the

<sup>1</sup> Report of Lieut.-Colonel van den Bergh to the Ministry of War, 25 July 1919, quoted in Niemann, *Revolution von Oben*.

<sup>2</sup> The Memorandum of 6 April 1919 also takes the view that Lieut.-Colonel van den Bergh had painted the situation at Berlin 'in far brighter colours' than had the Chancellery. On the other hand, the Crown Prince notes in his *Memoirs* that the news transmitted by van den Bergh, 'which was anything but good', confirmed the previous communications of the Government.

<sup>3</sup> This point is also made in the Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

very calmness of the revolution was a proof of its complete triumph. The Imperial régime, which was already 'the *ancien régime*', made virtually no resistance at all.

Hintze, who was convinced to the contrary, rang up Wahnschaffe, and asked him how van den Bergh's information could be reconciled with what he, Wahnschaffe, had given. It would appear after all that the streets of Berlin were not 'running with blood'. Wahnschaffe replied that he had merely transmitted the military news which had reached the Chancellery, and with unwearying insistence began his tale anew. 'The pressure here is intolerable. The Chancellor earnestly begs His Majesty to abdicate. This entreaty should be conveyed at once to His Majesty.'

Hintze once again asked to speak personally with the Chancellor. He was told to wait a moment and the Chancellor would come; but the Chancellor did not come. Hintze informed the Emperor of Wahnschaffe's despairing request, and it was then that William II decided to abdicate as Emperor but not as King of Prussia.

While Hintze was with the Emperor he was called up on the telephone from the Foreign Office. Captain von Ilseman took the call and transcribed the message from the Wilhelmstrasse, which was as follows:

'It is believed that the workers and soldiers will this afternoon proclaim a Liebknecht Government. The existing Government is powerless

against such action. All the troops in the country have gone over to the Socialists. His Excellency von dem Bussche is of opinion that in Berlin and the neighbourhood the troops, with one or two exceptions, will take up a similar attitude. He begs His Excellency von Hintze to use his influence to secure the immediate abdication of His Majesty in order to save the dynasty, which, in default of such abdication, is certainly beyond hope.'

The complete pessimism of Baron von dem Bussche was the more remarkable in that, several weeks earlier, this Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office had caused considerable irritation in Parliamentary circles by his excessive optimism. The unduly favourable news which he had communicated on 29 September to the Main Committee of the Reichstag, on the subject of Austria-Hungary and Turkey, had been contradicted by Stresemann, the National Liberal, and David, the Social Democrat, had reproached him with showing 'a complete lack of political acumen'<sup>1</sup> in his optimistic exaggerations.

Von dem Bussche's cry of anguish arrived too late to exert any influence on the Emperor's decision, which was already taken. William II would abdicate as Emperor but not as King of Prussia,

While the drafting of this act of abdication was being laboriously completed by the combined

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Max of Baden.*



efforts of one Admiral and two Generals (Hintze, Schulenburg and Marschall), the Chancellery continued to shower telephone calls on Spa. Berlin stated that 'it is now a question not of hours but of minutes'.<sup>1</sup> 'We were incessantly disturbed in our work', writes Hintze, 'by Herr Wahnschaffe, who continued to repeat, "the Emperor must abdicate immediately".' General Schulenburg, who had been at college with Wahnschaffe, went to the telephone and endeavoured to soothe him by saying: 'Definite decisions will shortly be taken.'

Schulenburg refers in slightly greater detail to his conversation with Wahnschaffe. 'Wahnschaffe', he said, 'demanded an act of abdication within a few minutes. I answered that so vital a resolution could not be taken in a few minutes. His Majesty had taken his decision, which was in course of being reduced to writing. The Government must be patient. In half an hour's time the final text would be available.'

Schulenburg's evidence is in contradiction with the repeated assertions of Hintze. 'Herr Wahnschaffe continued to press us, though no one had said a word on the subject of His Majesty's decision. I emphasised the importance of such tactics on our part, in order not to prejudice any decision which His Majesty might take. As soon as the act of abdication was drafted, we told Herr Wahnschaffe that His Majesty was about

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

to take a decision, but did not tell him what that decision was. Herr Wahnschaffe asked for information on this point, and I categorically refused to give it. I was unwilling to indicate the probable purport of the decision so long as such decision had not been finally taken by His Majesty.'

In point of fact—and this is clear from Schulenburg's evidence—the mystery with which William II's decision was surrounded was not so complete as Hintze makes out. Even before the act of abdication had been read out, the Chancellery knew that the Emperor had abdicated. 'The impression of everyone at the Chancellery', writes Max of Baden, 'was that at G.H.Q. events were shaping themselves as they were naturally bound to do after the report of the Supreme Commanders—*i.e.* that the Kaiser was going to abdicate. We were to receive the text of the act of abdication within half an hour.' Even if the telephone communication received by the Chancellery had been exactly what Schulenburg said it was, the Government of the Reich could give it no other interpretation than that the Emperor had decided to abdicate, and that all that was now being drafted was the formula in which the declaration of abdication should be clothed.

But Schulenburg's conversation cannot have been the determining factor in inducing the Chancellor to publish the news of abdication

through the Wolff Bureau. Chronological examination of the facts shows that Schulenburg's conversation was certainly posterior to Prince Max's decision to publish. Schulenburg telephoned after William II had abdicated as Emperor, that is to say, after 1.15 p.m. The Chancellor's manifesto was handed to the Wolff Bureau before midday.

After William II had signed the act of abdication as German Emperor but not as King of Prussia, so carefully drawn up by his advisers, Hintze called up Wahnschaffe on the telephone—it was after 2 o'clock—and according to his own evidence spoke as follows: 'Here is His Majesty's decision, which please note. I will read it.' 'Before taking the message,' he continues, 'Herr Wahnschaffe wished to know whether the Emperor had abdicated. Without answering him I begged him to listen to the Emperor's declaration. I was only at the second sentence when he burst in with the cry: "But that is ridiculous. The Emperor must also abdicate as King of Prussia. He must do so according to constitutional law." I requested him to hear my message to the end, since it was a message from the Emperor. He finally consented to do so, after several more interruptions. At the end he said: "Now listen to me. This is the proclamation which we have published."'

At the very moment that Wahnschaffe was talking to Hintze, Simons or Prittwitz—Wahnschaffe cannot remember which—called out to

him that special editions of the papers were being sold announcing William II's abdication both as Emperor and as King. He was given the text published by the Wolff Bureau, to which of course Hintze had in his turn to listen. 'The parts', notes the Crown Prince, in anger, 'were now reversed. It was Berlin which dictated and His Excellency von Hintze who had to listen and take note of what was said to him. The ex-Secretary of State immediately protested against this procedure.'

'Hintze at once asked, "Who published this message and when was it published?" Herr Wahnschaffe's reply was not explicit. I insisted upon a clear and definite answer and asked to speak with the Chancellor. After considerable hesitation, Herr Wahnschaffe made me the following reply, which Herr von Grünau noted on the spot: "This *communiqué* of the Wolff Bureau has just been published. The decision to publish it was taken after the news had been received from G.H.Q. that the Emperor's decision would be taken within a few minutes."'

Hintze replied that it had been announced on the telephone that a decision was taken, but that no allusion had been made to the nature of that decision. 'Herr Wahnschaffe replied that that was what he had told the Chancellor, and that the Chancellor had replied that it was impossible that the decision could be any other than that published, after what had been communicated to His Majesty, and after what had happened at Berlin.'

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

Hintze once again asked to speak to the Chancellor, and repeated his question, who was responsible for publication? 'Herr Wahnschaffe replied: "Here is Herr Simons who will give you all the necessary information."' It can easily be understood why, in presence of a situation the extraordinary complication of which he had not until now been in a position to understand, Wahnschaffe eagerly abandoned the telephone, at which he had practically been posted since the beginning of the morning, not to take it up again that day.

Simons, who took Wahnschaffe's place at the telephone, stated that there was 'nothing to be gained'<sup>1</sup> by the act of partial abdication communicated by Hintze. 'He defended my publication of the news to the Admiral,' writes Max of Baden. 'According to the information given by G.H.Q., we had acted in the firm conviction that the Emperor had taken an absolute decision to abdicate. Hintze made out that his telephonic messages did not allow of any conclusion being drawn as to the nature of His Majesty's decision. Simons asserted the contrary. In any case, we should never have been able to contemplate the idea of a partial abdication, an idea impossible alike for political and constitutional reasons.'

Simons then gave over the telephone a somewhat lengthy explanation of the situation in Berlin:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Hintze's *Notes*.

## THE<sup>9</sup> NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

'At Berlin the troops have gone over to the Social Democrats. The Socialist leaders have visited the Chancellery and demanded that the government should be transferred to themselves. The Government is of opinion that the publication of the news of abdication by the Wolff Bureau is the last possibility of preserving any initiative for the Monarchy.

'The Wolff Bureau is already occupied by a Workers' and Soldiers' Council.

'The Ministry of War has placed itself at the disposal of the new Government. It can no longer rely on the troops and it cannot do without the new Government if it is to maintain supplies for the army. The Ministry agrees that a representative of the new Government should co-operate with the Military Governor of Berlin, and that another representative should be placed at the Ministry of War. Troops reported as having mutinied are: a battalion of Jägers (with machine-guns), two batteries, several companies of the Alexander Regiment, the Third Regiment of the Guard, and the troops which were guarding the *Stettinerbahnhof*.

'The Military Governor informs us that he has no more troops fit for action, and that he can no longer even protect the public buildings.

'The new Government gained control of affairs between 1 and 2 o'clock.'

Simons' explanations were still insufficient for

Hintze. He once again asked for Prince Max, whom he persisted in calling the Chancellor, despite the handing over of power to the 'new Government', and asserted that the Wolff despatch was contrary to the Emperor's decision.

'Finally', he said, 'the Chancellor came to the telephone. I explained to him the various objections which I had already put forward, and asked him who had sanctioned the publication of this *communiqué*, when had it been published, and who was responsible. After some hesitation and reflection, Prince Max replied: "The situation made it impossible to suppose that any decision other than that indicated in the *communiqué* would be taken by His Majesty. I approved the *communiqué* after it had been published."' In point of fact, Prince Max had approved the *communiqué* before publication, but was not anxious to add yet further to a responsibility the burden of which he felt already to be crushing. He confines himself to writing in his *Memoirs*: 'At the other end my last-moment attempt to save the monarchy was looked upon as a *coup d'état*.'

### III

#### *Prince Max and William II.*

AS a reward for having held the post of Chancellor through five weeks of storm and stress, Prince Max of Baden suffered the worst of tribulations and has been unsparingly calumniated. He has been compared to Philippe Egalité,<sup>1</sup> he has been suspected of dark plots and has been accused of 'felony'.<sup>2</sup> The accusation was that he wished to ruin the Hohenzollerns, either because he was the son-in-law of the Duke of Cumberland, or because, in his ambition for office, he aspired to the title of Lieutenant-General of the Empire, and even to the Imperial Crown.<sup>3</sup>

William II never forgave either the Prince or his Secretaries of State. 'These fellows', he said, 'wanted to get rid of me. . . . But their attitude was equivocal. They behaved as if they did not want a republic, without understanding that their policy led straight to the republic. Attempts have

<sup>1</sup> *Pommersche Tagespost*, 10 October 1918.

<sup>2</sup> On 9 August 1919, the *Kreuzzeitung* commented severely on the 'felonious' behaviour of Max of Baden, in criticising an article which he had written to explain his policy on 9 November 1918. Similarly, the *Deutsche Zeitung* represents him as 'the man who, by his lying proclamation of abdication, opened the flood-gates of disaster and ruined the army'.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Schwerdtfeger referred to all these calumnies before the Committee of Enquiry of the Reichstag.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

often been made to interpret their acts by saying that they aimed directly at such a consummation. The equivocal conduct of the Chancellor led many people to the conclusion that he was working to unseat me, in order himself to become President of the Republic, after the intermediate stage of Lieutenant-General of the Empire. It is certainly an injustice to Prince Max to father such calculations on him. Such ideas are unthinkable in an old princely family of Germany.'

William II was convinced that his last Chancellor, the 'destroyer of the Reich', as he calls him, allowed himself to be out-generalled by the Social Democrats, who led him completely by the nose. 'Scheidemann', he says, 'kept his colleagues in the Ministry ignorant of his real intentions, and pushed the Prince from one stage to another by asserting that the Socialist leaders could no longer control the masses. He thus led the Prince to desert the Emperor, the Princes and the Reich.'

Later on, he overthrew this feeble "politician".'

So too the Crown Prince asks with bitter irony: 'Are there to-day any simple souls who genuinely believe that the German dynasties would not have fallen if the Emperor had agreed to abdicate in the early days of November? or who maintain even that there was still time during the morning of 9 November, and that the Revolution was not directed against the Monarchy, but solely against the person of the Emperor?'

## THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER AT BERLIN

To all this Prince Max replies: 'I am still convinced that before the evening of 8 November, and even well on into the forenoon of 9 November, before the mass of the people had sallied out into the streets, if the Kaiser had followed the way of safety which I pointed out to him, we should have had neither the Revolution nor the Republic of the Workers' Councils, nor the Kapp Putsch, nor the murder of Erzberger. I should have been able to lead Germany into the way of peace. The reforms achieved by my Government would have been safeguarded, and Germany could have developed her reforms without breaking with the past. . . . There would not now be two Germanies face to face, in opposition under two different flags.'



CHAPTER IV  
THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY



## I

*The Troops at Berlin—General von Scheuch and Governor von Linsingen.*

GENERAL VON SCHEUCH had become Minister of War on 9 October in succession to General von Stein who was too much of a Conservative to work with the Socialists. Scheuch, who was an Alsatian, was the Emperor's personal choice.<sup>1</sup> Long service at the Ministry of War had given him some slight experience of the ways of Parliaments, and his work as Head of the *Kriegsamt* had brought him into touch both with the business world and the workers. Prince Max speaks highly of his imperturbable calm, which, however, did not prevent him later on from challenging Ludendorff to a duel.

In the evening of 7 November, the Chancellor, together with the War Minister, received General von Linsingen, the Military Governor of Berlin, who expressed his absolute conviction of being able to hold the Capital. The troops at his disposal were not numerous, but they were excellent; and he was determined to act with energy, if not even with brutality and, if need were, to use artillery. Scheuch shared Linsingen's confidence. So, too, the next day, Colonel von Wrisberg, one of the Governor's immediate subordinates, said to the Burgomaster of Berlin,

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Max of Baden.*

the ex-Minister Wermuth: 'The troops in Berlin are sound and every hour more most dependable troops are coming in.'<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the naval mutineers arrived almost at the same time from Hamburg and Hanover, and the High Command became nervous. In the afternoon of 8 November, von Linsingen resigned. He had ordered an aeroplane attack on the trains carrying the insurgent sailors to Berlin. In some distress, the aviation authorities appealed to the War Minister, who—unknown to Linsingen—was about to be put in command of all the troops in the interior of Germany. Scheuch cancelled the Governor's draconian order, basing his decision on the instructions of General von Höppner, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Forces, who on 9 October had deprecated the use of aeroplanes in any action where friend and foe could not be distinguished.<sup>2</sup>

During the evening of 8 November, Scheuch was still optimistic about the situation. 'We in Berlin', he said to Prince Max, 'are garrisoning a besieged fortress; everything depends on our holding Berlin. . . . The army must relieve us.'

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Wermuth, *Ein Beamtenleben*, Berlin, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> The Generals to whom Scheuch appealed in July 1922 as judges of his military honour agreed that General von Höppner had formally condemned the use of aeroplanes in street fighting. Scheuch also forbade their use for attacks on trains carrying not only naval mutineers, but peaceable travellers. But he expressly recommended the use against trains, and generally in the struggle against the Revolution, of armoured cars.

His optimism was shared neither by the Chancellor nor by the Vice-Chancellor, von Payer, nor by Wahnschaffe, the Under-Secretary of State at the Chancellery, who considered that the troops in the interior of the country were in full process of demoralisation. They were crumpling up with a persistency that was most alarming. 'From all sides on 8 November we were informed of the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The officers were disappearing or merely looking on, where they were not expelled or maltreated. It was considered good news when it was learned that a particular body of troops asserted its loyalty, but stated that it would refuse to march against Germans.' <sup>1</sup>

In these circumstances, it needed only a Social Democrat with a loud, strident voice and of proved courage, the Deputy Otto Wels, once a journeyman upholsterer in Berlin, to appear, on the morning of 9 November, at 8 o'clock, and make a speech in the drill ground of a Berlin barracks, for the troops to go over at once to the cause of Social Democracy.

A battalion of Jägers had been specially ordered by Berlin from Finland on 8 November, for the maintenance of order; these were the 4th Naumburg Jägers. They were housed in the Government offices in the Wilhelmstrasse. Even a civilian like von Payer, the Vice-Chancellor, had his doubts, on the evening of 8 November, as to these troops;

<sup>1</sup> Payer, *op. cit.*



they did not seem to him particularly well chosen for the defence of the existing order. He was not surprised when on the morning of 9 November the battalion disbanded itself on the pretext of insufficient rations. 'This fearful news . . . undermined the whole fabric of our confidence.'<sup>1</sup>

About 11 o'clock that morning the journalist, Colin Ross, who was attached, as lieutenant of reserve, to the Press Department of the Foreign Office, arrived at the Chancellery and there gave a description of the scenes of fraternisation between the troops and the demonstrators. At the same time, David, the Social Democrat, informed the Chancellor that his Party was doing everything in its power to placate the mob. It would be dangerous, he said, to use arms against them. Prince Max requested the immediate attendance of the Minister of War, so as to enable a decision to be taken on the question. Colin Ross telephoned<sup>2</sup> on his own account to the Ministry of War that the soldiers must not use their arms. *Vorwärts* took a similar step—clearly a useful one in time of revolution. Special editions of the Socialist paper were distributed to the soldiers, with the caption: 'No Firing, by Order of the Chancellor.'

On his arrival at the Chancellery Scheuch found Scheidemann and the Socialists closeted with

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs* of Prince Max of Baden.

<sup>2</sup> This telephone call would not appear to have induced the War Minister to take a decision.

Prince Max. While he was giving his view of the situation, Lieut.-Colonel van den Bergh handed him a telephone message from von Linsingen, as follows: 'Most of the soldiers refuse to fire on the mob. Soldiers' Councils have been set up. In these circumstances, should fire-arms be used? The Governor demands an immediate answer.'

Scheuch replied that the troops should not fire unless the lives and property of the citizens were in danger, or if necessary for the protection of public buildings. Scheidemann objected. 'We can protect ourselves,' he said. Scheuch maintained his order.

Van den Bergh was given the answer: 'There can only be a question of protecting the life and property of the citizens where directly threatened. No use is to be made of fire-arms for other objects than these.' When van den Bergh transmitted this order he was answered: 'The Governor wishes me to say that the troops will probably now refuse to shoot even for the protection of public buildings.' As a matter of fact, without waiting for the decision of the War Minister, the Military Governor had, about midday, issued a General Order against the use of fire-arms: 'Troops are not to employ their arms even for the protection of public buildings.'

The most violent discussions have arisen concerning all the military orders given and decisions taken at Berlin on 9 November. The prohibition

of the employment of fire-arms would appear not to have been decided by the Chancellor and his Government. Prince Max asserts that never at any moment did he either impose or advise any limitation as regards the use of arms. On the other hand, he admits that his view was that, with unsound troops, any attempt at armed resistance would have led to the triumph of the extremists. Similarly, the Vice-Chancellor Payer holds that the Governor's prohibition was necessary and justified by circumstances. General von Linsingen had given on his own initiative an order which the Government would itself have given. 'And so the civil and military authorities capitulated without a struggle and without any attempt at resistance.'<sup>1</sup>

The whole story is the usual one of the confusion inherent in disaster. It was not until the evening of 8 November that the War Minister received from the Emperor the command-in-chief of the army of the interior, and it was not until the morning of 9 November that the Governor of Berlin was informed of the decision which placed him under the orders of the Minister. He had already resigned, as was announced by the Wolff Bureau during the evening of the 8th. Apart from the War Minister and the Military Governor, the officer in command of the Guard had

<sup>1</sup> Helfferich, *op. cit.* He asserts that the Cabinet forbade armed resistance. He heard this, he said, from a Minister during the afternoon of 9 November.

issued special orders to the troops in Berlin as follows: 'On 5 November, that they should not *use their arms* unless they were attacked by the enemy; on 9 November, that they should not *fire* unless they were attacked.'

Scheidemann takes the view that the revolution covered von Linsingen 'with an eternity of ridicule'. As a matter of fact, this old General, whose very ugliness lent him dignity, and who was renowned for his achievements on the Russian front at the head of his army group, was no more a figure of fun in Berlin than had been at Kiel the famous Admiral Souchon, who had capitulated to the mutineers, or than had been at Hanover the indomitable General von Hänisch, who had been made prisoner by his own troops. For a military leader there can be no more formidable trial than a military revolution. In November 1918 almost the whole of Germany was obsessed with the inevitability of the revolution, and this explains the fact that the change of régime was carried through so easily and without any particularly violent upheaval. Among the elements of the population who were loyal to the Kaiser, scarcely anyone made the slightest attempt at resistance in favour of the maintenance of the Emperor or the monarchy. As von Payer says: 'Everyone knew that such an attempt would have been utterly absurd and therefore criminal; it would have led merely to useless bloodshed and would have enhanced the opportunities of the Bolsheviks and Communists.'

## II

### *The Spa Conference of Officers from the Front—Results and Criticisms.*

IN order to convince the Emperor of the necessity of an immediate withdrawal the main argument employed by G.H.Q. was the testimony given against the loyalty of the troops by officers from the front who had been summoned to Spa.

G.H.Q. had convened regimental chiefs, brigadiers and divisional generals, to the total of fifty officers of high rank, all commanding units at the front. 'Among them were neither army commanders nor corps commanders nor chief staff officers nor staff officers.'<sup>1</sup> The officers in question belonged to the army groups commanded by Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, the Crown Prince, and General von Gallwitz. Neither the extreme Right nor the extreme Left of the front was represented, either because G.H.Q. considered that these sectors were too far from Spa,<sup>2</sup> or because G.H.Q. feared that they might be to some extent infected by the revolution<sup>3</sup> by reason of the proximity of one sector to Cologne and of the other sector to Strasburg.

<sup>1</sup> Account, published in the Crown Prince's *Memoirs*, given by an officer who had accompanied General Schulenburg to Spa.

<sup>2</sup> So says General Kabisch, who wrote two articles on the question in the *Kölnische Zeitung* of 18 January and 8 February 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Such is the assertion of Nowak.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY

Of the fifty officers invited, eleven were unable to come as the result either of motor-car breakdowns or other circumstances. Thirty-two arrived on 9 November before 11 a.m., having made all speed to Spa, and were present at an address given by Hindenburg. Seven, who arrived a little later, were in time to answer the questions put by G.H.Q.

Several of these officers, in particular General Kabisch, Major Hünicken,<sup>1</sup> and an officer whose name is unknown, who accompanied General Schulenburg, and who, at the request of the Crown Prince, drafted a statement of the interview which was published in the Crown Prince's *Memoirs*, have described the scene of which they were the reluctant witnesses. The detailed nature of their accounts does not preclude a certain tendentiousness in describing events.

On 8 November, at 10 a.m., General Kabisch received from his Corps Commander the order to leave his division, in company with another officer who was mentioned by name, and to prepare for an absence of several days. He was to proceed to Army Headquarters. There he was told that 'Bolshevism, which was extending its power over the whole of Germany, was paralysing all resistance to the enemy', and that G.H.Q. was anxious to interview representatives of the army

<sup>1</sup> Major Hünicken's memorandum was published in the military review, *Artillerikorps*, and appears as an annex to Niemann's *Revolution von Oben*.

at the front. At Spa, where he arrived during the morning, he heard a major from Wurtemberg state that South Germany was demanding the abdication of the Kaiser. This interview revealed to him a situation which he had not previously suspected.

Take next the account of Major Hünicken. Hünicken was a keen fighting soldier, and in 1919 was to form a volunteer corps on 'the Eastern marches'. On 8 November 1918, he was in command of a regiment which was encamped at Brévilly in the Ardennes. At 1 p.m. he was called up on the telephone from his Divisional Staff and ordered to put on his best uniform and be ready at 4 p.m. A motor-car would then take him probably to the Crown Prince, for what reason was unknown. At 7 p.m. he arrived at the Headquarters Staff of his Army Corps, namely, the First Reserve Corps at Cugnon in Luxemburg. There he learned that, with another regimental commander, he was to be taken to Spa. These two had been chosen because their regiments had distinguished themselves in the recent fighting. It was thought probable that they were to be asked for information concerning the general situation and the moral of the troops.

They left Cugnon at 4.30 a.m. on 9 November, and a few hours later <sup>1</sup> arrived at Spa. They went

<sup>1</sup> Hünicken says about 10.30. This is scarcely likely, because Hünicken heard Hindenburg's speech, and, as will be seen

to the Hotel Britannique where were the offices of G.H.Q. After showing their papers they were allowed to enter, and found themselves in a large room, the dining-room of the hotel, with about thirty other officers of high rank. Although tired after their night journey, which had followed on several weeks of heavy and continuous fighting, they were somewhat pleased to have been convoked and to feel that they were at G.H.Q. They were both chilled to the bone and glad to be in a warm room; but they were also hungry and were sorry that no lunch appeared to have been prepared for them.

There was a general recognition of friend by friend according as officers recognised one another in the group. Conversation was carried on, but almost in a whisper, so great was the general impatience to know what was toward. 'Conjecture followed conjecture as to the object of the meeting. The general impression was that it was probably connected with the Armistice, which everyone felt to be imminent.'<sup>1</sup> Suddenly, the general calm was broken by a General bursting into the room and rushing through it, crying: 'Detestable lies! Everyone here has gone mad.' It was General Schulenburg.

later, that speech must have been made before 10 a.m.; unless on this point Hünicken's evidence is superior to that of many other witnesses.

<sup>1</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

At this point Colonel Heye of G.H.Q. arrived and called the officers present round him.<sup>1</sup> He welcomed them on behalf of the Marshal, who, he said, would gladly have received them personally but was detained on urgent business by the Emperor. Heye explained to his hearers the extreme gravity of the situation. Within Germany itself the cry was for an armistice at any price. There had been trouble, even in the army; many of the categories hitherto excused from active service had refused to proceed to the front. The Colonel stated that he wished to ask the officers present two questions, to which each of them should reply individually, after carefully examining his conscience, and without allowing himself to be influenced in any manner whatsoever.

The questions were as follows:

(1) *What is the attitude of the troops to the Emperor? Would it be possible for the Emperor to regain control of Germany by force of arms, at the head of his troops?*

(2) *What is the attitude of the troops to Bol-*

<sup>1</sup> According to Hünicken, Colonel Heye arrived about 11 o'clock. As a matter of fact, he should have arrived about 10 o'clock, since Hindenburg spoke to the officers after he did, although, as will be seen later, Hindenburg probably spoke before 10 o'clock. According to Kabisch, Colonel Heye arrived 'shortly before 10 o'clock'. The officer who accompanied Schulenburg, whose account has been published in the Crown Prince's *Memoirs*, states that Heye started to speak about 9 o'clock, and that the meeting was fixed for 9 a.m.

*shewism?* Would they march against the Bolshevists in Germany?

Heye had scarcely finished reading out these questions when, contrary to his previous announcement, Hindenburg arrived. On orders given, the group of officers gathered round the Marshal. Orderly officers, on duty at the doors, indicated that the doors were locked and that the meeting was private.

The Marshal then addressed the meeting.<sup>1</sup> He warmly thanked the assembled officers for their help, and explained the situation. The revolution, he said, had broken out in Germany. The Kaiser's abdication was demanded. G.H.Q. hoped to be able to oppose the demand, provided it could obtain from the army the support and the guarantees necessary to enable it to take action. Hindenburg explained the Emperor's personal views on the situation. 'The question to be considered', he said, 'is whether His Majesty is in a position to march to Berlin at the head of his troops, there to regain possession of the Imperial and Royal Crown. In such circumstances a right-about-face would be necessary, and contact with the enemy, who would naturally continue

<sup>1</sup> The officer (name unknown) who accompanied Schulenburg, whose memorandum of the meeting is reproduced in *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922, makes no mention of any speech by Heye previous to Hindenburg's arrival. But Hünicken's account, which is far more detailed, makes Heye speak before Hindenburg arrived, and his evidence, which is confirmed by Kabisch, would seem to be conclusive.

the pursuit, would have to be broken. The object would be to reach Berlin by a series of marches during two or three weeks of continuous fighting. The railways could not be relied upon.<sup>1</sup> The railways, telegraphs, supply depôts and Rhine bridge-heads were in the hands of the insurgents. The supplies of the army were by no means inexhaustible. If the insurgents cut off supplies, the army was threatened with starvation.<sup>2</sup>

In these unhappy circumstances the Marshal expected the officers to do everything in their power to maintain the strictest discipline. He relied on them, and wished to make them personally responsible for doing their duty to the end, as he was doing it. Whatever happened, he himself would remain at the head of the army and lead it back into Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Major Hünicken describes this unforgettable scene with much emotion. There stood his former Corps-Commander, Hindenburg, whom he had not seen since 1910, with a face of a sickly greyish pallor, profoundly serious and sad. His fists were

<sup>1</sup> Schulenburg's Memorandum of 26 August 1919. Schulenburg says that his account is that of two witnesses.

<sup>2</sup> Schulenburg's Memorandum of 7 December 1918.—The General's account is taken from a witness. According to Major Hünicken, the Marshal showed how the commissariat of the army would be compromised if the supply depôts on the lines of communication and in the interior of the country were pillaged. The railways could no longer be relied upon for the transport of food or munitions.

<sup>3</sup> Hünicken.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY

tightly, almost convulsively clenched; his eyes were red, no doubt with tears. By his side stood Gröner, impassive and unfathomable. Behind them, General von Plessen could no longer restrain his tears and was holding his handkerchief to his eyes.

After his address, the Marshal and his escort left the room. It is certain that his speech was not a long one.<sup>1</sup> It was not his custom to make long speeches. But what he did say told. Major Hünicken says the impression created by Colonel Heye's altogether unexpected speech was made yet more arresting by Hindenburg's intervention. 'There was a silence as of the tomb,' he says; 'not a movement, not a whisper. Each of us looked about for some seat or secluded corner, to think over what we had been told and to reflect on a situation of which we had hitherto known

<sup>1</sup> In the Memorandum published in the Press on 27 July 1919, which is a narrative the accuracy of which is guaranteed by Hindenburg himself, it is stated merely that, before waiting on His Majesty, the Marshal hastily greeted the officers, all of whom had not yet arrived. In point of fact, Hindenburg did make a statement, although a brief one, on the general situation. He could not have spoken at any great length. It would seem certain that the conference with the Emperor, at which he was present, began about 10 o'clock. This is the testimony of Major Niemann, who was walking with the Emperor in the garden of La Fraineuse when the Marshal was announced. So too the important Memorandum of 27 July 1919 fixes the beginning of the conference with the Emperor at 10 o'clock. In his report of 26 August 1919, Schulenburg wrote: 'about 10 o'clock'.

nothing.' General Kabisch got the impression from Hindenburg's speech that the Marshal thought that any resistance would be useless. An officer who had just listened to the Marshal said to Schulenburg: 'The situation was painted for us in such gloomy colours that it could be predicted what the officers would say—namely, that the army did not want civil war.'<sup>1</sup> Later, two witnesses added: 'The situation which was the *raison d'être* of the Marshal's questions was so desperate that a reply favourable to His Majesty could hardly be expected. In such circumstances it was impossible for the army to be with the Emperor.' One of these officers was the officer whose memorandum is reproduced in the Crown Prince's *Memoirs*. He regrets bitterly that the Marshal, who was universally honoured as a great leader, should have been compelled to show himself 'in so paltry an attitude, which, in any view of the situation, differed absolutely from what we had expected and hoped of him'. He deplored the gloomy picture of the situation which Hindenburg had painted, 'filling in all the details himself'.

<sup>1</sup> Schulenburg seems to think that this confidence was made to him before the meeting with the Emperor, at which he was present with Hindenburg. This seems very unlikely. Schulenburg had passed through the room in which the officers were assembled before Hindenburg made his speech. This appears from Major Hünicken's narrative. After making his speech Hindenburg proceeded immediately to the conference with the Emperor at which Schulenburg was present.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY

Gradually the officers began to form themselves into groups and exchanged their gloomy impressions. The consternation of all present was general, amounting almost to complete and utter collapse. There was general indignation against the insurgents, and vows were registered to pay them out one day for their treason.

An officer from G.H.Q.<sup>1</sup> asked to be allowed to speak, 'in order to explain the situation, since, judging by their comments, the officers present did not seem to know or understand it'. With brutal frankness he detailed the triumphant progress of the insurrection. At Kiel the Navy had mutinied. Hamburg, Lübeck, Cologne and the greater part of Germany was in the hands of the insurgents, who held all the Rhine bridge-heads. The troops in the rear were retreating in disorder, and some of them had gone over to the Revolution. The supply and munitions depôts were being pillaged. Telephonic and telegraphic communication with the rear was almost completely interrupted. The King of Bavaria and the Duke of Brunswick had already abdicated. At Berlin civil war might break out at any moment. The troops at the front were supplied with food and munitions for a few days only. The army was

<sup>1</sup> Major Hünicken expresses somewhat bitter regret that he does not know the name of this officer. It was probably Major von Stülpnagel, whom General Kabisch records as having taken part in the discussion.

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

threatened with a great disaster.<sup>1</sup> 'The collapse of Austria has made the military situation desperate. The Italians are in a position to invade South Germany and we have no reserves to send against them. We must accept an armistice whatever its terms may be. We are at the enemy's mercy.'<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

Thus the last illusions of the assembled officers were dissipated. Then began the interrogation for the purpose of which they had been summoned to Spa. It was about half-past eleven. One point made by Major Hünicken is worthy of emphasis: most of the officers thought out their replies by themselves, and did not converse about it with their nearest neighbours or take advice. This detail makes their evidence yet more important.

In twos and threes the officers passed in order into an adjoining room where Colonel Heye noted their statements. The first to be called were the officers of the army group of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria.

Major Hünicken went in with a General and another Major. These latter had just been questioned and Hünicken's examination was beginning when, about 12.30 p.m., several officers arrived in a state of great excitement, looking urgently for Colonel Heye, who was wanted by

<sup>1</sup> Hünicken.

<sup>2</sup> So Kabisch, who summarises thus the statements of Heye and Stülpnagel.

Hindenburg. Heye answered that he had still to collect the replies of about a quarter of the assembled officers, and that he would come as soon as he had done so. Shortly afterwards, a staff-officer arrived. Colonel Heye was to wait at once upon the Emperor. Asking the General whom he had just interrogated to carry on with the examination of the other officers, Heye took with him the notes concerning the replies already received, and left hurriedly for La Fraineuse. According to his statement made later, he was unaware that the subject of discussion at La Fraineuse was the Kaiser's abdication.

The results of the officers' Referendum were as follows:

(1) *Would it be possible for the Emperor to regain control of Germany by force of arms, at the head of his troops?*

One officer only was of this opinion, while twenty-three expressed the contrary view. Fifteen replies were ambiguous. Among the latter, Hünicken held that the troops would remain loyal to the Emperor and that they would undoubtedly fight a foreign enemy, if need were; but that they would need rest and 'moral preparation' before beginning a struggle against an enemy on the 'home front'.

(2) *Would the troops march against the Bolshevists in Germany?*

Eight officers thought that they would not. Nineteen were doubtful of the attitude their men



would adopt to Bolshevism. Twelve, of whom Hünicken was one, thought that a period of rest was indispensable in order to prepare the men for the struggle, which could be undertaken under the most favourable conditions if the security of their homes and families appeared to be threatened.

Major Hünicken thought that the answers given might have been other than they were if an army leader such as the impetuous General Schulenburg had appealed to the enthusiasm of the officers. He was sure that they would have been favourable if the Emperor himself had appeared and made an appeal to their loyalty.

At the close of the interrogation the officers took a solemn oath to maintain absolute silence as to what had occurred. Colonel Heye had explicitly stated that 'no one should speak of the business even with other officers. At the end of the meeting the senior officer present would receive the word of honour on this point of all who had been present.'<sup>1</sup> Events were soon to release the officers from their oath. Max of Baden had already issued the news of the Emperor's abdication.

Luncheon, offered by G.H.Q., began about 2 o'clock. 'Naturally enough, the only talk at lunch was of the Emperor, the armistice and the gloomy

<sup>1</sup> Hünicken. According to Nowak, one of the officers present urged secrecy 'so that there may be no possible chance of the Emperor's being accused of fomenting civil war'. According to Kabisch, it was Hindenburg himself who imposed secrecy.

prospects for the future.’<sup>1</sup> The extreme depression which prevailed at table was yet further accentuated when news arrived of William II’s abdication and of events at Berlin. Nevertheless, it was ‘astonishing’ to what an extent these officers, who in the morning had been ‘extremely depressed both morally and physically’, now appeared ‘different men in the afternoon when, after a rest, a wash and some food, they talked over their cigars’.<sup>2</sup> After lunch the party broke up, some returning to the front immediately, while others postponed their departure until the following day.

\* \* \*

This meeting, which would seem to be unprecedented in the history of the German army, has been severely criticised. General Schulenburg was not disposed to trust to the judgment of officers who, coming from the front, where they received next to no information of events in the outside world, were suddenly confronted with the most alarming news. They were all under the impression of the retreat which the German army was at the moment carrying out, and they arrived at Spa numbed with cold after a most fatiguing night-journey. ‘Their physical and moral condition cannot have been without influence on their judgment.’

One of Schulenburg’s companions—the officer

<sup>1</sup> Hünicken.

<sup>2</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany*, London, 1922.

from whom the Crown Prince took his information—also describes the utter demoralisation of the officers, who were thus ‘an easy prey to discouragement and pessimism’. Almost all of them had come straight from depressing and exhausting fighting, which had been going on for weeks. Many of them had, lightly clad, just come off a night-journey of several hundred kilometres in an open car. They knew nothing of the general situation and could only accept blindly the unduly unfavourable information current at Spa, and could make no attempt to pick the simple truth out of so confusing an embroidery.

Major Hünicken also condemns the meeting, to which he had himself been summoned. He criticises the questionnaire, above all for its political character. It was clear that the one object of G.H.Q. was to cover itself. The very idea of the meeting was unsound. The soldiers who took part in it had formed the habit of receiving clear and precise orders, and of carrying them out to the best of their ability, with the most absolute confidence in their leaders. The whole order of things was now reversed; the High Command was asking for the advice of its subordinates. ‘The right course would have been to ask for the impossible from above, if the best possible results were to be obtained. The difficulties were there to be overcome.’

General Kabisch took the same view. The rank and file of the army should receive its inspiration

from above, and should not be expected to inspire the High Command. He regretted that he had not answered G.H.Q. as follows: 'We are not in the army to give advice, but to carry out your orders. Order us to sacrifice our lives to maintain discipline, and we are ready to do so. But we cannot and will not express opinions on political questions. You should not throw on to us a responsibility which is wholly yours.'

The Crown Prince himself rebukes G.H.Q. for having hastily summoned a 'council' of officers from the front, 'without the authorisation of the army group and army commanders'. And the unknown officer who supplied the Crown Prince with his information would have preferred to see the Chiefs of Staff of the various armies summoned. He considered that to hear the officers from the front without the knowledge of their respective staffs was a piece of incomprehensible negligence. 'Was G.H.Q. by any chance afraid of the views of the Corps-Commanders and the Chiefs of Staff? There was no reason for any such fear.'

Hintze would not appear to share this view. In the report which he drew up a few weeks later for the Minister of the Royal Household, he called the meeting of officers from the front a 'military Parliament' (*Militärparlament, Armee-parlament*), and added that he used this term in no critical sense. He left it to be understood that, in such tragic circumstances, it might well

be thought desirable not to have recourse to the army groups or armies, if the real spirit of the troops was to be discovered. Until 9 November the official reports had been '*couleur de rose*'. They described the troops as sound and their moral as excellent, with rare exceptions: *e.g.* the 18th Landwehr Division and the 6th Bavarian Division, which had refused to fight.

It is understandable therefore that G.H.Q. should have wished to short-circuit the army staffs, and obtain information, as Hindenburg puts it in his *Memoirs*, from 'a number of officers in command of large units, men of the soundest judgment and worthy of all confidence'.

### III

#### *The Army at the Front and the Troops at Spa—General Gröner's Position.*

THE question whether the troops at the front, in general, and those at Spa, in particular, were or were not loyal, has been the subject of the most heated argument. The opponents of abdication have reproached G.H.Q. for being more alarmist than accurate. The various units traduced have found defenders to assert the excellence of their moral. None the less, the evidence proffered by G.H.Q. can hardly be questioned. The moral of the army was growing daily worse.

As early as 4 November, after the last review held by the Kaiser, some unfortunate incidents were reported. The Kaiser had visited the 4th Army, which was under the command of General Sixt von Arnim, in the army group of Rupprecht of Bavaria, and had conferred decorations on soldiers chosen from fourteen different divisions. On his way back it was noticed that among the troops whom the Imperial party met there was 'an atmosphere of studied aloofness, cold looks, and even marked disaffection'. The troops hardly troubled to give the customary salute.<sup>1</sup> William

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*.—Restorff.—In his *Memoirs*, William II makes no allusion to this 'obverse of the medal'. He confines himself to stating that he was 'everywhere joyfully

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

II reports the unanimous evidence of the<sup>f</sup> army commanders: although the troops at the front were still well disciplined, the same was not the case with the troops in Germany itself, and soldiers came back from leave in a very bad frame of mind.

On 9 November, on his way to Spa, the Crown Prince came across 'men worn to skin and bone, full of wretchedness and resentment, looking as if they would never again find any hope or joy in life. . . . These scarecrows of men, crushed under the weight of God knows what horror, were our soldiers of yesterday. Clenched fists and muttered oaths were only too sure indications of the new mentality that had conquered part at least of our army, which had once been so proud of its impeccable correctitude.'

\* \* \*

The troops at Spa numbered about 5,000, together with about 500 officers at G.H.Q. One battalion—the Rohr battalion—was on guard duty at Imperial Headquarters. A battalion officer, Lieutenant Count Eberhard von Schwerin, has reproached General Gröner for having suggested doubts in the mind of the Emperor and of G.H.Q., as to the reliability of this unit.<sup>1</sup> The saluted by both officers and soldiers'. A Saxon regiment was particularly enthusiastic.

<sup>1</sup> Schwerin tells the following story in explanation of General Gröner's mistrust. There was a certain sentry-post near the General's villa. 'One of our men, who was acquainted with sentry-duty, as men are in garrison work in the interior, left his post for a few moments, and was surprised by the General.'

first Soldiers' Council formed at Spa urged that the battalion should be disarmed and threatened to cut off its supplies.

Nevertheless, the apprehensions of G.H.Q. would seem to have been in great part justified. On 9 November, after about 4.30 p.m., the majority of the rank and file ceased to salute the officers, and formed groups in the streets of Spa. So, too, the soldiers attached to various staff headquarters in the town gave proof of a very bad spirit.<sup>1</sup> In the evening 'there was considerable unrest. Groups of soldiers stood about talking and gesticulating wildly; officers hurried here and there; while the Belgians looked on in ironical curiosity. The streets were filled with motor lorries, fire-arms were being unloaded before the offices of the staff. General Gröner had given instructions for each block of buildings to be put in a state of defence. On the Imperial train the wildest rumours were current as to the imminence of an attack by the mutineers. The Second-in-Command of Imperial Headquarters painted the situation, as was his custom, in the darkest colours.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hünicken.

<sup>2</sup> Niemann: *Kaiser und Revolution*.—The Second-in-Command at Imperial Headquarters was Baron von Münchhausen, who, as has been stated, waited on the Emperor and Hindenburg during the afternoon. Lieutenant von Schwerin speaks of him as a chief 'full of understanding and amiability'. He saw Münchhausen again about 9 p.m. Münchhausen indignantly declared that he would not 'have anything to do with it', and that he had resigned from the army.



## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

A Soldiers' Council was set up even before William II's departure during the night of 9-10 November. It was composed of the motor-car staff and of the sailors attached to the Wireless Service.<sup>1</sup> On the morning of the 10th, the services in question ceased to operate. 'I was extremely surprised that even at G.H.Q., with its hundreds of officers, the Soldiers' Council had been able so soon to seize power.'<sup>2</sup> On the evening of the 10th, certain soldiers of the Rohr battalion took part in a meeting of the Council. On the 11th the Rohr battalion had its own Council, and G.H.Q. officially recognised the Soldiers' Councils in order to avoid disturbances. There had at one time been a possibility that all the officers at G.H.Q. might be arrested by the Councils.<sup>3</sup> Discipline deteriorated still further as a result of these events, and for several days may be said to have disappeared altogether.

Erzberger, who passed through Spa during the morning of 12 November, noted that 'the soldiers did not salute their officers and the motor-cars were carrying red flags. . . . The officers' epaul-

<sup>1</sup> Schwerin.—According to Schwerin, G.H.Q. issued information as early as the evening of 7 November that a Soldiers' Council was in course of formation at Spa. Schwerin asserts that the information was unfounded.

<sup>2</sup> Restorff.—Restorff left Spa on the afternoon of the 10th. He criticises G.H.Q. for not having made the slightest attempt to protect itself against the Soldiers' Councils, and for having so quickly accepted the view that their supremacy was something inevitable.

<sup>3</sup> Erzberger, *op. cit.*

ettes had been removed.' Mass desertion was quite common. 'The trains were crowded with soldiers standing on the footboards and seated on the roofs of the carriages.' Erzberger concludes: 'Similar scenes were witnessed in Russia.'

\* \* \*

One division which was supposed to be particularly sound had been established since 5 November in the neighbourhood of Verviers. Its mission was to protect G.H.Q. against a revolutionary movement directed from Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, and even<sup>1</sup> to force the Rhine crossings and retake Cologne. This was the Second Division of the Guard. At the conference held during the evening of 8 November, General Gröner stated that the division could no longer be relied upon and would no longer obey its officers. In his *Memoirs* Max of Baden attaches great importance to the defection of this division. Schulenburg admits that the division had not fulfilled the hopes entertained of it, but adds that this was hardly surprising. The troops were physically and morally exhausted by uninterrupted fighting, and unfitted for so difficult a task.

General von Friedeburg, who commanded the Second Division of the Guard, has denied all the statements concerning the revolutionary attitude of his troops;<sup>2</sup> he asserts that his men held out

<sup>1</sup> According to Max of Baden.

<sup>2</sup> General von Friedeburg's denial was not published until 1 August 1927. It will be found in Niemann's *Revolution von Oben*.

against the general revolutionary infection until 10 November. His account is a marvellous picture not only of the really desperate situation of his division, but also of the universal disorganisation.

'The most recent battles had eaten up the best of the troops. . . . The men's clothing was torn, their equipment defective, and the men themselves were apathetic and worn out. The effectives were reduced to a minimum, infantry regiments contained no more than two battalions of 200 men, and only some of the guns had artillerymen to serve them.' On 5 November the transport of the division towards the German frontier was begun. The earlier trains left at the appointed time, but for the later trains there was a wait of twenty-four or thirty-six hours, sometimes through the night and under rain. 'Trains passed decorated with red flags. In the stations were undisciplined hordes of men who were anxious only to return to Germany. . . . A portion of the railwaymen were on strike and the soldiers had themselves to make up the trains. Sometimes the way had to be cleared by a threat from the machine-guns.'

The division did some work in resisting pillage by the men of other units. At the railway station at Liège they repulsed by force a crowd of leaderless soldiers, partly drunk, who wished to take by assault the train which was occupied by a detachment of the division. 'At Herbesthal

station trains passed decorated with red flags and filled with a howling mob. Thousands of leaderless soldiers were crowded in the station in an attempt to return to Germany, and greater or smaller groups of soldiers could be seen without officers and in disorder, passing along the roads on their way back to Germany. . . .

Even if the above account proves that until 10 November the Second Division of the Guard remained stoically at its post in the midst of the general flood of demoralisation, it would seem that G.H.Q.'s and General Gröner's pessimism was not without foundation.

In view of the furious criticisms with which he was assailed after 9 November 1918, Gröner appealed in 1922 to a Court of Honour against one of his most violent traducers, General Count von Waldersee. This Court, which was composed of Generals von Boehn, von Below, von Kühl, von Held, von Ziethen, Johow, von Hülsen, Finck von Finckenstein, and von Eisenhardt Rothe and Colonel Grautoff, satisfied itself that 'the accusations brought by General Count von Waldersee against the general mentality of General Gröner and the motives which determined his action are unjustified. In the most difficult circumstances, General Gröner acted according to his conscience and conviction, holding that thus he could best serve the interests of his country.'

Eight months after the events of 9 November,

## THE FALL OF THE KAISER

at an almost equally tragic moment, General Gröner was to act as he had acted on 9 November 1918. The question at issue was whether the Treaty of Peace was to be accepted. On behalf of the officers of the Reichswehr, General Maercker, whose duty it was to protect the National Assembly, stated that if the peace was accepted the Reichswehr would no longer support the Government and could no longer be responsible for the maintenance of order. 'This', writes Erzberger, 'was the first military revolt of officers in the new German Republic. No other description can be given of the attitude which the officers took up at this juncture. The critical moment seemed to have arrived for Germany: the dilemma between anarchy in the event of signature and anarchy in the event of non-signature.' At this moment, during the night of 22 June 1919, Erzberger received a telegram from the Chief Quartermaster-General, Gröner. In it the General stated that, 'speaking not as an officer but as a German', he considered it absolutely necessary that the Treaty of Peace should be signed. 'After that,' adds Erzberger, 'there was some hope that anarchy could be averted if the Government maintained a firm attitude.'

## CONCLUSION



## CONCLUSION

*The Journey to Holland—'Death in Action'—German  
Comments.*

IN his *Memoirs* William II gives an extremely summary account of the events of 9 November.<sup>1</sup> His main object is to justify his decision to go to Holland. 'I wished to save my people from civil war. . . . All my advisers recommended me to proceed to a neutral country in order to avoid civil war. . . . I was subjected to a fearful internal struggle. As a soldier, I revolted against the idea of deserting the brave troops who were still

<sup>1</sup> In a footnote William II refers the reader for an account of 'this fatal day' and the preceding days to the 'noteworthy account published by Major Niemann'. In the few pages which he devotes to the events of 9 November he adopts the following plan:

1. During the morning Max of Baden informs the Emperor of the necessity of abdication (9 lines);
2. In the presence of Schulenburg and the Crown Prince Groner states that the army cannot continue to fight (13 lines);
3. During this conference telephone call follows telephone call from Berlin emphasising the growing danger of revolution (8 lines);
4. William II decides to abdicate as Emperor but not as King (8 lines in justification of this decision);
5. From Berlin the Chancellery replies that complete abdication has been proclaimed (one page devoted to reproaches addressed to the Chancellor);
6. All the Emperor's advisers recommend him to proceed to Holland (2 pages in justification of the departure to Holland as the least of various evils).



loyal to me. On the other hand, there was the declaration of my enemies, who were unwilling to conclude with me a peace which would be tolerable for Germany, and *my own Government's assertion that only my departure for a foreign country could avert civil war.*'

There would seem to be no trace of this assertion of the German Government in the despatches or messages addressed by Berlin to Spa. It is certain that the Government begged and prayed William II to abdicate, but it did not request him to leave Germany, and this is in particular the decision—(*evasit, erupit, excessit, abiit*)—which has been made the subject of the bitterest reproaches against the Kaiser, as a defection and a desertion such as to discredit him for ever in the eyes of his people. It is therefore of interest to examine closely the conditions under which this decision was taken.

Before he took down from William's dictation his message of abdication as Emperor, von Hintze had never heard the Kaiser allude to such a possibility, and states that he was surprised at the Emperor's sudden change of front. But he also recalls the conversation which he had with Grünau when, after the Imperial decision, the two of them left La Fraineuse; it would appear that the Emperor had for several days discussed the question of abdication with his entourage and was prepared, if necessary, to abdicate as Emperor. Clearly Max of Baden had not altogether wasted

## CONCLUSION

his breath in talking of abdication to the Emperor. The idea was not now so far from the Emperor's thoughts that it was impossible for him to resign himself to it. But although William II had lost almost all hope of remaining Emperor, he thought that he could still remain King of Prussia. He was unwilling to degrade himself either too far or too soon.

Later on, in Holland, the Emperor stated to Niemann that since the end of October it had been clear to him that he would have to sacrifice himself. In his *Memoirs* he also raises his final decision 'to the heights of a sacrifice'. 'I left all personal considerations in the background. I knowingly sacrificed my person and my throne with the idea that so I could best serve the interests of my dear country. Germany had had enough of war. She must be spared civil war.'

So too the Crown Prince, in his *Memoirs*, draws from the general situation the conclusion that the Emperor had not gone to Holland on his own initiative. 'On the contrary, he struggled as far as possible against any attempt to solve the question on these lines. If finally he yielded through sheer war weariness, this was solely because of all the devices put into operation to undermine his convictions and to make him recede from his own resolutions. The persons in his own immediate entourage, his official advisers, and above all the higher officials of G.H.Q., will kindly remember what I say, and cannot but agree with it.'

The Crown Prince's appeal was answered by Hindenburg.<sup>1</sup> Hindenburg points to the definite nature of the decision taken by the Emperor on 9 November on the unanimous proposal of all his competent advisers. 'The danger was that Your Majesty would sooner or later be taken prisoner by the insurgents and delivered over to the enemy, whether at home or abroad. Such a disgrace to the Fatherland had at all costs to be averted. During the afternoon of 9 November I advised Your Majesty, on behalf of us all, to go over into Holland, as the last chance, which then seemed to me to be merely a temporary expedient. Even to-day I consider that the proposal was the right one.'

It was beyond doubt that Hindenburg made this proposal to the Emperor on the afternoon of 9 November; but the idea of going into Holland was not a chance improvisation conceived at the last moment in the form of a wild flight which might have been provoked by the progress of the Revolution and events at Berlin.

Previously, during the morning of 9 November, in the course of the conversations in the garden of La Fraineuse, the Generals discussed the question where the Emperor could go if he did not remain at Spa. 'Some recommended Switzerland. The Marshal, however, preferred Holland. In that monarchical State the Emperor would certainly be more sympathetically received,

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 28 July 1922, addressed to the Emperor.

## CONCLUSION

and Spa was no more than sixty kilometres from the Dutch frontier.’<sup>1</sup> According to von Plessen, Hindenburg had, even before 9 November, suggested to the Kaiser that he should go to Holland. He had spoken of it to him as a possible refuge ‘several days earlier’.<sup>2</sup>

It has even been suggested that there had been some question of the kind for a considerable time. It was stated that a Dutch General who had been authorised to visit the German front had been interviewed on the subject.<sup>3</sup> This was General van Heutsz, ex-Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. Lieutenant von Schwerin reports that towards midnight of 8–9 November, his chief, Major Rohr, was called to G.H.Q. He was instructed to make ready for the next morning a company of his battalion to carry out military exercises showing modern methods of attack, for the benefit of a Dutch general. ‘Soldiers are accustomed to reflect upon orders received only if the execution of them is likely to be difficult. In

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 27 July 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Hintze's *Notes*. On 8 April 1919 von Plessen stated in the presence of Hintze, Schulenburg, Marschall and Count Westarp, that Hindenburg had spoken to the Emperor of proceeding to Holland several days before 9 November.

<sup>3</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 11 November 1918. According to the categorical statement of Scheidemann in his *Memoirs of a Social Democrat*, London, 1929, the Kaiser had known since the end of October that the Dutch frontier was open to him, the personal intervention of a certain August Personage on the side of the Allies having dissipated certain hesitations on the part of the Dutch Government.

this case there was no such difficulty.<sup>6</sup> We thought these exercises strange at such a moment, but attached no particular importance to them.' The exercises began at 9 a.m. next morning and lasted two hours. 'Later, we wondered what interest the Dutch general who was at Spa on 9 November could possibly take in such evolutions.<sup>1</sup> The existing accounts of the events of 9 November say nothing of his presence, and I doubt whether all the departments concerned knew of it.'

Schwerin thus leaves it to be understood that the Emperor's journey to Holland had been arranged without the knowledge of the Emperor. The same statement is to be found in Niemann. As early as 7 November it was announced in Holland that the Emperor would take up his residence in the district of Apeldoorn. 'At Berlin there had been foresight enough to secure that all the necessary arrangements were made. . . .' Is it possible that certain high officials were convinced that William II would go to Holland, and so made the necessary arrangements for the journey? It is impossible to do more than raise the question. Judging by Schwerin's evidence, the answer would have to be in the affirmative, since according to him, on 9 November at 12.30 p.m., and consequently at a moment when the Emperor had taken no decision of the kind,

<sup>1</sup> Enquiries made among certain eminent Dutchmen have convinced the author that General van Heutsz' presence at Spa on 9 November was fortuitous.

## CONCLUSION

7

Major Rohr, on his return from G.H.Q., said to his Lieutenant, 'During the night the Emperor will leave the army and proceed to Holland.' Orders were given to detach a company to mount guard over the Imperial train to which the Sovereign was to proceed on leaving the Château of La Fraineuse.

\* \* \*

It is no concern of this study to consider the question whether William II was well or ill-advised in deciding to leave Germany for Holland. The Emperor himself has done his utmost to justify a decision which filled some of his most devoted adherents with consternation.

'Some say', says the Emperor, "'the Kaiser should have committed suicide". But my firm convictions as a Christian were against this. Besides, people would have said of me, "The coward! He is evading his responsibility by suicide". Others say, "The Kaiser should have proceeded to the front, have charged the enemy at the head of a detachment and sought death in a final attack".' All sorts of people have held this view. In one of his numerous 'marginal notes', William II himself wrote, in June 1914, on the subject of Albania, 'the Prince<sup>1</sup> should fight and conquer, or die at the head of those who remain loyal to him'. At the end of October 1918 Count August Eulenburg thought that the Emperor would join the army and endeavour to find a hero's

<sup>1</sup> William of Wied.

death. The former Secretary of State for the Interior, Clemens von Delbrück, who had succeeded the ardent Conservative, von Berg, on 9 October as the Emperor's Chief Civil Private Secretary, left for Spa on 8 November with the object of dying at his King's side.<sup>1</sup> He arrived at Spa five hours after the Kaiser's departure. On behalf of the Junkers of Pomerania, the ex-Chancellor Michaelis, 'President' of the province of Pomerania, informed the Empress<sup>2</sup> of a similar desire on his own part and begged her to submit the scheme to her husband. At the subsequent reception William II did not exchange a word with him.

Happening to be alone with the Emperor for two hours on 3 November, Admiral von Hintze 'cautiously' explained to him the desirability of his presence at the front among the fighting troops. William II agreed and stated that he would go to the front. Three days later he told Hintze, who had just returned from Berlin, 'I was received with enthusiasm at the front.' Further 'diplomatic' questions revealed that the Emperor had not passed beyond the depôts on the lines of communication where the recruits were stationed. 'This was not at all the sort of journey

<sup>1</sup> Nowak.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Memoirs* Michaelis makes only one very discreet allusion to his suggestion. 'It was a matter of infinite difficulty . . . to show the noble lady how the Emperor could preserve the monarchy for the German people.'

## CONCLUSION

intended', even though aeroplane bombs had fallen fairly close to the Imperial entourage and a little later near the Imperial train, an incident which gave William II the opportunity to recite 'in a serene but subdued voice' the words put by Shakespeare into the mouth of Julius Cæsar: <sup>1</sup>

'Cowards die many times before their deaths;  
The valiant never taste of death but once.  
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
Will come when it will come.'

Hintze had told Gröner that the Emperor should, in his view, visit the front. Gröner stated that the Marshal would never agree. Later, he told Hintze that on several occasions he had spoken with von Plessen of this idea, and that each time Plessen had replied, 'Surely you would not expose the Kaiser's life!'

Gröner himself reports that, immediately after Drews' visit, he said to Generals von Marschall and von Plessen that the Emperor's position was untenable. 'He should visit the front, not to review the troops and to confer decorations, but to look for death. He should go to some trench which was under the full blast of war. If he were mortally wounded, it would be the finest death possible. If he were wounded, the sentiments of the German people would be completely changed towards him.' The two Generals both stated

<sup>1</sup> Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*.



that such an idea was out of the question.<sup>1</sup> Hindenburg also disapproved of the idea. He was unwilling to allow the Emperor to run the risks incurred in action.

Schulenburg writes that Gröner should have approached the Emperor directly. 'He would not have been refused!' None the less, in his *Memoirs*, William II discusses, only to reject, the idea of proceeding to the front in search of death. 'It would have had the effect not only of preventing the armistice, which was eagerly awaited by the people, and for which we were already in negotiation, but also of needlessly sacrificing the lives of our best and loyallest soldiers.' So too the Crown Prince. 'It was impossible for the Emperor to proceed to the front, to fight and die there, for fear that such a decision might give rise to false interpretations likely to prejudice German interests represented and defended at that very moment at the armistice conference.' The faithful Niemann paints the picture more vividly still: 'Seek death on the field of battle? Times have changed. Was the Kaiser to wait in some ditch of a trench for the merciful missile which would put him out of his misery? Was he to burrow in some shell-hole, only to fall perhaps wounded

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of Gröner at the Munich trial, October-November 1925. At this period von Marschall was dead. Plessen states that Gröner never held any such language to him, but he adds that if any such suggestion had been made to him he would, in the interests of the dynasty, have refused to submit it to his master.

## CONCLUSION

into the hands of the enemy? From the sublime to the ridiculous——'

\* \* \*

Apart from the fanatical monarchists, there is very little agreement in German public opinion as to the criticisms which might be made on the events of 9 November, and on the final act of the drama, the retirement to the 'ease and comfort' of a neutral country.<sup>1</sup> In support of this view it will be enough to point to the contrast between the exaltation of Emil Ludwig, 'a writer of the Left', and the prosaic version of a man far removed from the field of romantic literature, such as von Payer, ex-Vice-Chancellor, one of the Old Guard of the Democratic Party.

. While Ludwig stresses the 'theatrical' nature of the 'confused, pathetic scene' which took place on 9 November, Payer emphasises 'their most ordinary and natural aspects. 'If I had had time to imagine the course of events in advance I should probably have formed a somewhat different idea of so catastrophic an upset of the existing régime—an idea of more violent events from which the spirit of "business" would have been altogether debarred. On 9 November itself I got the impression that this historic event could have taken no other shape than this extremely ordinary one. Everything in this extraordinary history happened in the most ordinary manner. Apart from those in the immediate entourage of the Sovereign,

<sup>1</sup> E. Ludwig, *Wilhelm der Zweite*.

all concerned understood perfectly well that the destruction of the monarchy and the transfer of power to the masses were *faits accomplis* By mid-day on 9 November. There could henceforth be only one question at issue, namely, the question of clothing these *faits accomplis* as simply as possible in some formula of juridical confirmation.'

In company with those who reproached William II with having deserted not only his post and his armies, but also his wife and children, Emil Ludwig holds that the 'fifth act' of abdication 'could only have fittingly ended with a shot behind the scenes, or else a ride to the battle-front'. 'Ten words to his assembled officers "To the front", and with the old Prussian Hurrah!'. —Or, 'Had he not perpetually appealed to the Great Frederick? Frederick had always carried poison about him.'

This is not Payer's opinion, who claims that his conclusion is the simple one to be drawn by common sense and complete impartiality from the history of 9 November. Payer takes the view that William II was wrong not to leave the scene earlier, and that he would now appear 'in a better light if he had on his own initiative and in good time sacrificed himself for the Reich'. When it was roughly awakened by the disaster, the country overwhelmed the Kaiser with its anger; but 'by his departure the Kaiser rendered his people a twofold service; voluntarily, by deciding against

## CONCLUSION

the wild ride to death which was expected of him by people who were even more sentimental than he was, and by thus abandoning the idea of further useless slaughter; involuntarily, by relieving the Reich, by his departure to Dutch territory, of all political responsibility on the subject of his person'. His presence in Germany would have been a serious embarrassment. Otto Hammann, who for nearly thirty years was head of the Press Bureau at the Wilhelmstrasse, also considers that the Kaiser's departure considerably facilitated the heavy task of the civil and military authorities of the Reich. A Social Democrat like Ludwig Herz goes so far as to maintain, not without irony, that the chief service rendered to Germany by William II during the thirty-one years of his reign was rendered when he left it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Herz, *Die Abdankung*, Leipzig, 1924.

# INDEX

- August Wilhelm, Prince, 25, 61, 153
- Authorities quoted, *see under*:
- Baden, Prince Max of  
    Crown Prince  
    Hünicken, Major  
    Kaiser  
    Ludwig, Emil  
    Niernann, Major  
    Wahnschaffe
- Baden, Prince Max of, 12, 16, 20, 24, 33, 44, 48, 59, 75, 119, 129, 144, 167, 182, 191, 198, 201, 210, 255
- Bavaria, Rupprecht of, 38, 214
- Brockdorff-Rantzau, Count, 25
- Chancellor, Imperial, *see*  
    Baden, Prince Max of
- Chelius, General von, 18
- Cohn, Oscar, 15, 175
- Crown Prince, 85, 87, 90, 93, 105, 120, 124, 128, 135, 141, 158, 170, 197, 202, 214, 217, 227, 231, 242
- David, 44, 48, 210
- Delbrück, Clemens von, 19, 84, 248
- Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 5, 201
- Draudt, Lieut.-Colonel, 17
- Drews, 30, 35, 37
- Dryander, Ernst von, 18
- Ebert, Friedrich, 11, 44, 48, 66, 125, 163, 172
- Eisner, Kurt, 42
- Eitel Fritz, Prince, 49, 119, 153
- Emperor, *see* Kaiser
- Empress, the, 18, 35, 106, 153, 248
- Erzberger, 29, 34, 41, 118, 234, 238
- Eulenburg, Count August, 18, 61, 247
- Eulenburg, Prince Philipp, 70
- Fraineuse, Château de la, 81, 85, 101, 106, 124, 143, 182, 220, 242
- Frankfurter Zeitung*, 12, 21, 23, 39, 106, 122, 245
- Friedberg, 30, 34
- Friedeburg, General von, 235
- Gallwitz, General von, 214
- G.H.Q., 20, 46, 68, 72, 88, 118, 134, 147, 183, 214, 223, 228
- Gontard, von, 106, 137, 183

# INDEX

- Grönitz, General, 36, 42, 60,  
69, 74, 76, 83, 90, 105,  
112, 128, 131, 136, 147,  
178, 221, 233, 237, 249  
Grünau, Baron von, 19, 55,  
59, 82, 101, 135, 149,  
155, 183
- Haase, Hugo, 15  
Haussmann, Conrad, 5, 11,  
16, 26, 40, 163, 170  
Hertling, Chancellor von, 57  
Hesse, Frederick Charles of,  
32  
Heutsz, General van, 245  
Heye, Colonel, 88, 109, 218  
Hindenburg, Marshal, 36, 69,  
74, 77, 83, 89, 128, 131,  
136, 143, 151, 157, 182,  
218, 220, 229, 243  
Hintze, Admiral von, 22, 36,  
56, 82, 101, 125, 131,  
136, 141, 155, 180, 194,  
229, 242, 248  
Hohenlohe Langenburg,  
Prince, 16  
Hünicken, Major, 215, 220,  
228
- Ilseman, Captain von, 147,  
192  
Kabisch, General, 214, 215,  
218, 228
- Kaiser, the, 3, 19, 27, 34, 53,  
60, 69, 74, 77, 82, 88,  
90, 101, 117, 124, 130,  
136, 141, 150, 157, 170,  
182, 201, 231, 241, 247,  
250  
*Kölnische Zeitung*, 214  
*Kreuzzeitung*, 65, 201
- Lancken, von der, 7  
Lansing, Robert, 3  
Lerchenfeld, Count, 31  
Levetzow, Captain von, 142,  
146, 155  
Linsingen, General von, 207,  
208, 212  
Ludendorff, Marshal, 57, 84,  
87, 110, 181, 207  
Ludwig, Emil, 3, 153, 183,  
251
- Marschall, General von, 21,  
68, 89, 128, 136, 153,  
183, 249  
Memoirs, *see under*:  
Baden, Prince Max of  
Crown Prince  
Kaiser  
Michaelis, Chancellor, 18,  
181, 248  
*Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 23  
Münchhausen, Baron von,  
140, 149, 233

# INDEX

- Niemann, Major, 3, 10, 21,  
68, 71, 74, 83, 86, 110,  
125, 131, 137, 145, 149,  
155, 182, 221, 250
- Noske, Gustav, 11, 40
- Officers' Referendum, 225
- Payer, von, 6, 22, 28, 51, 58,  
74, 77, 122, 165, 172,  
179, 186, 212, 251
- Plessen, General von, 69, 74,  
89, 104, 125, 138, 146,  
179, 186, 221, 245
- Prussia, crown of, 10 f., 109,  
117, 121, 130, 136, 143,  
192
- Reich, Government of, 10, 12,  
39, 179, 195, 253
- Reichstag, 11, 163
- Reichswehr, 42, 238
- Restorff, Captain von, 142,  
155, 234
- Rœdern, Count, 14, 27, 51,  
106, 172
- Rohr Battalion, 128, 133, 149,  
159, 232
- Rohr, Major, 149, 155, 245
- Romberg, von, 16
- Ross, Colin, 210
- Scheer, Admiral von, 142,  
154
- Scheidemann, Philipp, 3, 24,  
27, 44, 49, 66, 163, 170,  
185, 210, 245
- Scheuch, General, 22, 30,  
172, 189, 207, 210
- Schulenburg, Count, 86, 94,  
104, 107, 112, 122, 124,  
130, 180, 194, 217, 235,  
250
- Schwerin, Count von, 149,  
155, 232, 245
- Simons, Walter, 26, 33, 122,  
168, 198
- Social Democrats, 11, 47, 163,  
172, 185
- Solf, Wilhelm, 11, 14, 19, 27,  
65, 170
- Treutler, von, 16
- Van den Bergh, Lieut.-  
Colonel, 190, 211
- Vaterlandspartei, 16
- Vorwärts*, 11, 172, 210
- Wahnschaffe, 19, 34, 60, 65,  
100, 119, 122, 165, 180,  
194
- Waldow, von, 65
- Wels, Otto, 209
- Wermuth, Adolf, 208
- Wilhelmshöhe, Castle of, 71
- William II, *see* Kaiser
- Wilson Notes, 3, 8
- Wrisberg, Colonel von, 207

